new masses

Marxism and Freedom

RENE MAUBLANC

Hell-Bent for Depression

RALPH J. PETERS

What the Mine Strike Means

JOSEPH NORTH
VIRGINIA SHULL

What is Jazz?

LAWHON MILFORD
THOMAS McGRATH
S. FINKELSTEIN

DECEMBER 10, 1946

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just a minute

WHEN Norman Corwin toured the world recently for the One World Foundation, he sought out Peter Kapitza and asked the eminent Soviet scientist what he thought of confining the application of atomic energy to bombs. Dr. Kapitza replied that it was like confining electricity to the electric chair. The answer becomes more profound as you ponder it. Imagine a world barely illuminated by whale oil and kerosene lamps, with the means of brightness kept locked up in the death house! The criminality of a system that would have denied the social uses of electricity can be appreciated because we are familiar with an electrically operated world. Of course, there are millions still living without its elementary benefits, not only in rural areas but in many a city, including our continental pride, New York. We also recall the thousands of people who had their juice turned off because they couldn't pay the monthly bill. That was during the last depression, a period fixed in our own mind when we saw a man reading a paper under an outdoor electric light, as his house was dark. In the same paper was an ad telling the man about a wonderful new electric gadget that perked your coffee, beat up the eggs and made toast all at the same time.

But even the better-heeled never enjoyed a fraction of the marvels of the electric age, as a trip to the last World's Fair demonstrated. The know-how in electrical application was staggering in the variety of things displayed, and we all gawked at them like creatures out of the Ice Age. It never occurred to most people to wonder why the things displayed weren't in the average home.

Nevertheless, even if not every woman owned electrical devices that would have reduced her housework to half an hour a day, our age was still, more or less, the end product of the nineteenth century wonder period of science and invention, when the bourgeoisie was expanding and progressive. So great was the wonder and awe over the inventiveness of man that the distinguished statesmen of the time (before submarines, airplanes, jet propulsion and atomic energy) declared that man's ingenuity had reached its maximum.

Today we face a period of invention and expansion that makes the last century look like the Pleistocene Age. Except that the bourgeoisie is regressive; so we are not going forward, except in the bomb department.

Spokesmen for the cartels and the trusts tell us that we are fifty, seventy-five, maybe a hundred years away from commercial application of atomic energy. Which as far as they are concerned means never. But if they used the same amount of concentration for the peaceful uses of atomic energy as they do for war, then, brother, what wouldn't be possible? We could have leisure, culture, a life-span in which the hundred-year-old geezer would be a commonplace, and he wouldn't be a geezer. Some scientists have speculated that if enough atom bombs were exploded at a certain height above the polar ice cap, all the ice would melt, the climate of the world would be effected, and we could live a life of unwintered ease. I do not have the exact statistics, but something like the atomic equivalent of an average lump of coal could heat twenty blocks of apartment houses for two or is it three years, or provide enough fuel to power all the transatlantic boats for an unbelievable length of time. With atomic energy, it would no longer be necessary for man to dig in the bowels of the earth, since coal would become obsolete. Industrially backward countries like India and China would not have to stumble through the coal and iron age to become self-sufficient. In a few years, all countries of the world would enjoy a wealth that would make the present affluence of the United States look like the contents of a bindle-stiff's bundle.

All of the foregoing is hardly revelation, but something like it flashes through the mind after reading Dr. Kapitza's statement. Socialism, like food to a hungry man, becomes something to think about, because only when the means of production get to be owned in common will we have the full flowering of the atomic age.

J. F.

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DEPRESSION IS A HORRID WORD

But no matter how you spell it, falling wages plus rising production is a trend to disaster. What can be done about it?

By RALPH J. PETERS

THE United States is in the midst of a boom which puts any previous peacetime boom in the shade. The Federal Reserve Board's index of industrial production (1935-39=100) stands at 185 for October, 1946. Compare that with 110 for the legendary year of 1929, and 162 for 1941, strictly a peace year, though war factors were strong.

The crest of the boom does not, however, seem to create "confidence," that most precious, if elusive, state of mind required for the capitalist to feel his best. On the contrary. Every day new voices, in business as well as government, shrill their warning notes. If the boom is here, can the bust be far behind?

That financial expert is indeed a rare bird who is not busily predicting the next "recession," "shakeout" or "readjustment." They all have their pet names for the next economic crack-up; nobody likes the horrid word "depression." But the experts are as short on serious analysis as they are long on devising euphemistic names. Their diagnosis is limited to the repetition of this cacophonous theme: prices are too high, because of "exorbitant" wage demands on the part of labor; therefore a "reaction" is inevitable before we can get on a more normal basis.

They make it sound like a matter of technical adjustment —just a cog here and wheel there a little bit out of whack, requiring a minimum of expert manipulation to get the entire mechanism back into good running order. But the problem of booms and busts goes deeper than that; to put it in its proper frame of reference, let me repeat the passage from Marx quoted in Emile Burns' article entitled "Why the Boom Will Bust" (NM, Oct. 22, 1946):

"The last cause of all real crises remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses as compared to the tendency of capitalist production to develop the productive forces as if only the absolute power of consumption of the entire society would be their limit." (Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 568.)

Now let us see. Can we measure purchasing power? Can we get some idea of the magnitude of the productive forces? Can we estimate the direction in which these elements are tending? Yes, there are statistics available which, though inadequate, enable us to discuss these problems on a factual basis.

First let us tackle purchasing power. Nothing serves our purpose so well as the following table which appeared in a recent press release of the Department of Commerce. It compares income payments for the first eight months of 1946 with the same period of 1945.

	Income payments (in billions of dollars) for the first eight months of		Percent change
	1946	1945	1945 to 1946
Total income payments ...	105,965	106,471	Minus 0.5%
Salaries and wages	68,370	75,743	Minus 10%
Dividends and interest ...	8,388	7,379	Plus 14%
Entrepreneurial income, net rents and royalties	21,120	18,601	Plus 13%
Public assistance and relief	751	645	Plus 16%
Other income payments ..	7,336	4,103	Plus 78%

There are several points that require comment. But first let me say that this table proves decisively the utter falsity and maliciousness of the fashionable theory that all economic ills are to be traced to high wages. It proves the exact opposite. As a matter of fact, it is the share of national income that goes to profits ("dividends and interest," "entrepreneurial income, net rents and royalties") that increased by about 13 to 14 percent while the share to wages ("salaries and wages") fell by about 10 percent. And even this is misleading because the Department of Commerce in its perverse manner mixes with wages the whopping big salaries

The boom and bust cycle is satirized by a trade unionist who marched in the CIO contingent in San Francisco's Labor Day parade. Sketched by NM's contributing editor, Anton Refregier.

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that corporation executives pay themselves. High corporation salaries should by rights be separated from wages and included with profits. If we look at the behavior of the Bureau of Labor Statistics index of manufacturing payrolls and see what it did during the same period (from the first eight months of 1945 to the first eight months of 1946), we'll get a better idea of the extent to which wages fell. This comparison shows a drop of 23 percent; if we also calculate the drop in the purchasing power of wages due to consumer price increases, it would yield a total decline in real wages of 30 percent (computed from current BLS releases on employment and wages).

THIS large decline in real wages means that purchasing power is dropping. Now the question arises: if it is true that purchasing power is falling, how then account for the current wave of record-breaking consumer purchases? In the Eighth Report of the Director of War Mobilization and Reconversion, John R. Steelman emphasizes that the present boom is based to a large degree on savings of the war years when consumer goods were scarce. There is something further to be said on that score too. The Department of Agriculture recently conducted a survey of liquid assets in the hands of individuals; it showed an extraordinary concentration of the savings held by the top income groups. The maldistribution of savings revealed in the survey moved an advertising agency to advise its clients not to waste money on "ineffective purchasers," but to concentrate on advertising directed toward the top 30 percent of the income classes, who hold 87 percent of liquid savings. (N. Y. *Sun*, Oct. 10, 1946.)

If wages are falling and savings are concentrated in the upper income groups, then the current boom must be based on a shaky foundation, to say the least. Let me introduce further testimony from Mr. Steelman: "Consumer spending for non-durable goods, which is apparently now on a plateau, is one of the big question marks. It is too early to tell whether, with the relatively small increase in spendable income that is in prospect, consumers will be willing to absorb all the consumer durables that will flow into the market and still continue to buy non-durable goods and services at the present high rates. Much will depend on the rate at which consumer income increases as well as on the course of consumer prices. . . . The increased flow of consumer durable goods, especially at present high price levels, will require consumers to increase their total expenditures far above even their current high levels if the goods are to be sold."

Had Mr. Steelman taken into consideration the fact that real wages are falling, he might not have raised the hope for increased spendable income; and the prospect of the consumers being able to buy the flood of durable goods that is predicted—automobiles, refrigerators, washing machines—would have seemed to him even more problematical. Again, he speaks of the plateau on which consumer purchase of non-durable goods is moving. Actually, in terms of physical volume, *the purchase of food and clothing has not risen for months; in fact, current figures are below those of the early spring*. But if we speak in terms of dollar volume, then there is no plateau. Prices continue to soar, the dollar share of income going for food and clothing is forced up from day to day; and the share that may be left over for the purchase of durable goods seems ever more dubious.

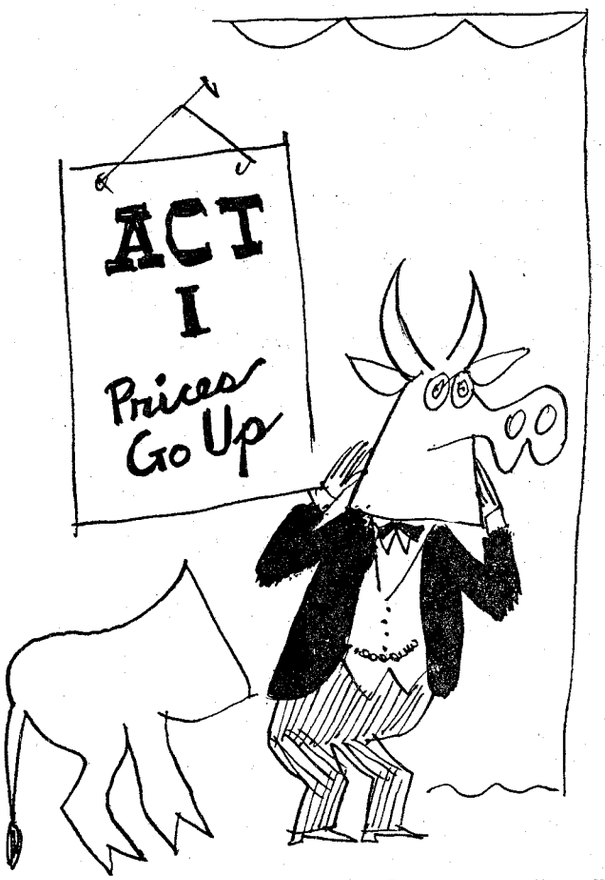
The following table taken from Mr. Steelman's report indicates the extent to which production is now dependent on civilian purchasing power. Gone are the days when the government guaranteed markets for the lion's share.

	(*billions of dollars at annual rate*) Second quarter, 1945	Third quarter, 1946
Gross national product	$187.1	$185.5
Less: government expenditure for war	68.6	12.5
Total for civilian use	118.5	173.0

In other words there has been a colossal rise in the amount of goods that depends in the last analysis for its final sale on the purchasing power of civilians.

TO GET the full picture we must turn to the profit share of national income. It is clear that the money that goes to profits acts differently from the money that goes to wages. The worker has to spend his wage on daily necessities. Profits go to a tiny segment of the population, and if the capitalists indulged in every kind of luxury and extravagance that their jaded fancy could conceive, they could still spend only a small fraction of their profits. Capital must expand continuously; the masses of profit that are realized must be invested in further profitable enterprise; idle capital serves only to bring down the general profit rate. Therefore, it is the inherent drive of capital to accumulate and expand, to seek ever new fields of investment.

Can we estimate the rate of capital accumulation in the United States? Let's start with the war years. We know that the capitalists accumulated an enormous mass of capital during World War II. During 1941 to 1945, inclusive, according to the figures of the Department of Commerce (*Survey of Current Business*, April 1946), a total corporate



Our next act will really

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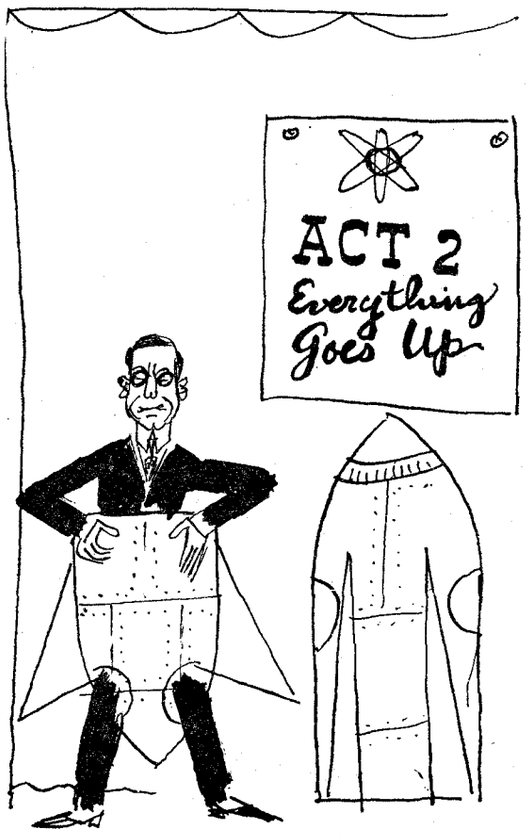
profit after taxes of $47,200,000,000 was reported. At this time we shall make no attempt to estimate the additional amount of concealed profit. Of this vast sum, $25,300,000,000 was ploughed back into the corporations and the remainder, $21,900,000,000, was distributed in the form of dividends.

It would be misleading to assume that this amount of dividends went into consumer purchasing power, particularly in view of findings by the Temporary National Economic Committee that in the pre-war years on the average 1.1 percent of all those who received any income got 60 percent of all dividends, and the next 2 percent got an additional 20 percent. (TNEC Monograph No. 12, page 50.) This extraordinary concentration of dividend payments indicates that the bulk of wartime dividends would also go for capital accumulation. It is fair to assume that by far the larger part of the entire $46,800,000,000 of wartime profits are now seeking profitable investment opportunities.

But at the present time "business profits, after taxes, are at the highest point in history . . ." (Steelman, 8th Report of OWMR). That means accumulation is proceeding at an even higher rate than during the war. Let us remember now our first table, which showed the profits components of national income increasing at the expense of the wages component. It is evident that the rate of capital accumulation is running at a level never before reached in the history of this country. This enormous mass of capital must be invested unless it is to hang over the economy like an incubus, dragging down the general rate of profit. The present rate of investment is high; according to the figures cited in Steelman's report, it is running at the level of $33,000,000,000 per annum. This is the highest rate ever reported, much larger than the 1941 figure of $19,100,000,000, the previous high water mark for gross capital formation. But we must examine the components of this enormous figure, and compare its makeup to the composition of the 1941 figure.



bring the house down! Rudy Bass.

GROSS CAPITAL FORMATION

(calculated on an annual rate)

	Third quarter, 1946	1941	Percent change 1941-1946	Composition Third quarter, 1946	1941
	billions of dollars				
Gross capital formation	$33.0	$19.1	173%	100%	100%
Construction	10.0	5.3	189%	30%	28%
Producers' durable equipment	11.0	8.9	124%	33%	47%
Net exports of goods and services	5.5	1.4	393%	17%	7%
Net change in business inventories	6.5	3.5	186%	20%	18%

This is a most instructive table. It will be seen at a glance that the greatest increase has occurred in exports; the remarkable rise in importance of exports may perhaps account for the impassioned pleas of Secretary Byrnes for worldwide "freedom of opportunity." But the most significant development is the reduced role played by investment in producers' durable goods. This after all is the measure of expansion of the productive forces, and this vital element makes a relatively anemic showing. In 1941 it accounted for 47 percent of total capital formation; by 1946 it dropped to 33 percent. While the other components were expanding by at least 86 percent, investment in producers' durable goods grew by only 24 percent. This increase is less than the inflationary rise in prices and actually means that there is no real advance over 1941 in basic capital investment. It must be pointed out that calling "net exports of goods and services" capital formation is really a bookkeeping device, especially since the export of capital plays an infinitesimal part in this category. The same might be said for "net change in business inventories." But there is another angle besides; the high figure for the latter component represents a serious threat to the stability of the current boom. This huge rate of inventory warehousing is being used to run up prices, but at the same time that it forces prices out of sight, it may clamp a brake on production.

In view of the enormous mass of accumulated capital seeking investment, the low rate of investment in producers' durable goods plays the part of Achilles heel to the robust-appearing figure of $33,000,000,000 capital formation. And unless it increases substantially it portends, after immediate wartime influences have played out, a tapering-off of economic activity, with the growth of a large chronic unemployment, and a return to the doldrums of the Thirties.

There is another side to the investment of accumulated capital that should not be forgotten in this discussion: the increase in productivity. By that we mean the measure of the amount of goods that a worker can turn out in a given interval of time. According to the War Labor Board estimate, productivity increased by 25 percent during the war years. We can put it this way: in 1945 three workers could produce in a day's work what it required four workers to produce in 1940. All of this gain has not yet been consolidated, due for the most part to the confusions of reconversion and the breakdown in efficient routing of critical materials when we changed over from relatively organized war production to the normal chaos of peacetime capitalism. The following simple table that compares the Federal Reserve

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Board index of manufacturing production with the BLS index of production workers in manufacturing indicates that there has been, nevertheless, a substantial rise in productivity.

Year	*Manufacturing Production*	*Production workers in Manufacturing*	*Output per worker*
1939	100	100	100
1940	116	108	107
1941	154	132	117
1946 (Jan.-June)	175	138	127

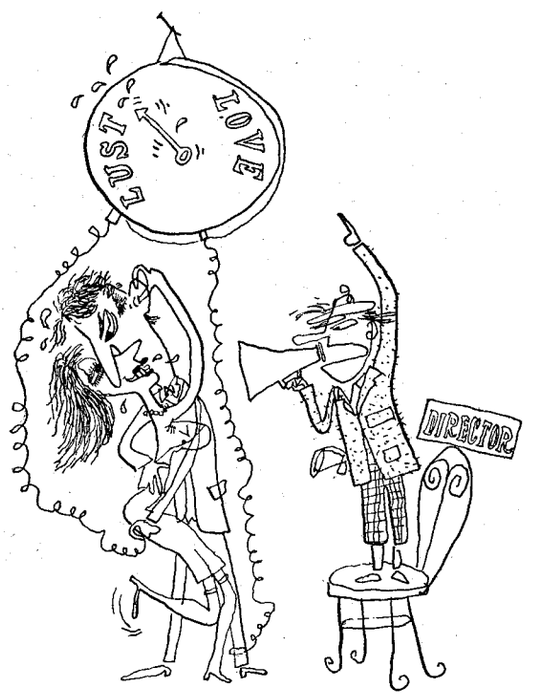
WE MUST think through the full significance of increasing productivity, which is a long-term characteristic of capitalism; but in this case even in the short period from 1939 to the first half of 1946 there was the large rise of 27 percent. It means that a given amount of capital invested in wages in 1946 would produce about 27 percent more goods than it would have in 1939. It means that more goods relatively can be turned out while relatively less wages are paid. Here is a direct expression of the inherent tendency of capitalism to increase the disparity between the volume of production and the purchasing power of society. It also means that each new capital investment is more productive; therefore the problem of finding profitable fields of investment is intensified, since each new enterprise pours out a greater flood of goods while paying relatively less wages. The necessity of selling this mass of goods to the ultimate consumer who has relatively less money to buy with develops into a nightmare, and leads directly to a crash.

The term "productivity" can be taken as a shorthand indicator of the growth of fixed capital at the expense of that part of capital set aside for wages. It operates all the time, but speeds up during a boom phase when the rate of capital accumulation goes sky high, and there is a "healthy" rate of investment in "producers' durable goods." It must be emphasized that the process of capitalist production is a mighty involved affair; there are wheels within wheels. A depression will come when there is a low rate of capital investment, but a high rate of capital investment which pushes up productivity and opens the gap between volume of production and purchasing power will also bring a smash.

The question arises: What can be done to reverse the trends that are leading to economic crisis? Crises are an integral part of capitalism, and as long as the system continues to exist there will be crises, but the violence and impact of any given crisis can be curbed to the extent that the power of the monopolistic corporations is curbed, purchasing power raised and social insurance extended. The basic economic significance of the Republican victory at the polls lies in the added freedom of action that will undoubtedly accrue to the corporations. This is the logical result of the Truman administration's retreats on price control and other New Deal measures that had the net effect of maintaining to some degree consumer purchasing power. From now on the corporations will be in a more advantageous position to accentuate the postwar trend indicated above. The announced plans of Republican leaders for cutting the federal budget, slashing taxes on big incomes and getting tough with labor can have but one result: reducing labor's and the common people's share in the national income, restricting mass purchasing power, and hastening the advent of the approaching crisis.

The CIO convention has proclaimed its purpose of forcing the corporations to disgorge some of their superprofits and to increase wages. If successfully carried out (and that means avoiding the corporations' riposte of a second round of inflationary price rises), the CIO's program for an increased share of the national income for labor and its allies can serve as a counteracting force deterring the onset of the crisis. This is one of the major battles before the American people.

FORMULA FOR A MOVIE



Jamieson.

Known came down the splintered way
Died the rhythy dome
Frundindam, the widest knock-kneed babe.

Frundy called and quickly plungered,
Frundy of the Dindam Fam
Had the bargest size patellas
That a metamorphis ever made.

Head shaped like a bowling ball,
Her beady eyes would bristen lime
Whenever Wulgus Waver yawled her mane.

Wulgus' feet were rowboat long,
Narrow skull ears shoulder walled,
Slack on the go get stumble hide.

Rock to the ground beraffed they brundled
Over the ringlet wide.
By the leaping goo goos their tonsils touched
Under the wilgrown everlane.

Trend the markened doon cast faded
Bound the velvet smoothly scene
The sun arose rayumphantly.

IRVING SEGALL.

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INJUNCTION AGAINST YOU

An Editorial by JOSEPH NORTH

I AM not a miner but I am aghast at the front pages these days, shamed to witness the infamous libels upon the 400,000 hardy men who merit the utmost gratitude of our nation—the diggers of coal. One feels like shouting "Go down, fellow-Americans, go down deep into the earth, peer through the dark of the mines, count the dead swallowed up by the stuff that moves our daily civilization, talk with the men who daily challenge the rock-fall and deadly coal-gas, go into their homes and speak with their children, their wives, look about the muddy streets of their 'patches,' and then ask yourselves if the press speaks truth when it says, 'America, this man is your enemy.'"

Let us know our enemy, and our friend. Let us know who is being atrociously maligned by comfortable men whose motivations mark them as the contemptible foe, not only of the miners, but of all that pertains to our national welfare. Let us know who is being shielded. In all this frenzy the coal operator's responsibility was eerily extricated from the scene. He sits, a fat cat benignly licking his chops, secure behind the blunderings of the administration, sitting it out as though this is all a show put on for his benefit. And in many ways, it is. I say that we must, at risk of our future, realize precisely what is at stake here, and know clearly, without vestige of misapprehension, the issues and the men behind them. For the issues are even greater than the immediate fate of the coal miners: the future of labor, the future of the middle classes, of all America, is integrally involved.

I wish, in this page, to focus attention upon one aspect: the strategy underlying the presentation to our people of the "case" against the coal miners. If we see that we can discern a great deal about the future.

I see a supreme effort to divide the 400,000 coal miners from labor generally; and simultaneously, to alienate the middle classes from the miners, and consequently, from labor. One can trace the workings of those who plot the atomization of progressive America, the destruction of our democratic core, the dissipation of all advances won in the past decade.

Scrutinize the press campaign: incautious Americans are being pressured to accept the concept of the miner as a calculating, selfish, cruel misanthrope eager to close the schools, stop the trains, chill homes, throw millions out of work, strangle the economic life of the nation. The politically-unlearned will permit the press to obtrude the baleful figure of John L. Lewis upon them in order to obscure the real issues. The uninformed will be beguiled by the malignantly pettifogging arguments of Secretary Krug, President Truman and all those in the administration who are ceding to reaction's pressures.

But what is at issue? This: the miners' right to strike; and hence, because this case can be used as a latter-day precedent, all labor's right to strike. What is the danger? That the infamous injunction will once again operate against labor—will once again be a mace in the employers' hands as it was at Bloody Ludlow and hundreds of similar strikes.

What is it the miners want? This: measures that have been won by great sectors of our working class—a forty-hour week instead of fifty-four hours. And at wages that would enable them to meet the drastically increased cost of living.

Had they the right to raise these demands? The government contends that the past contract foreswore this right. But others, more objectively versed in law and the meaning of contract—like the National Lawyers' Guild—contend otherwise. They argue, with labor, that issuance of an injunction against the UMW is illegal for the mine dispute comes within the meaning of the Norris-La Guardia anti-injunction act, and that the judge has no authority to punish John L. Lewis for his alleged contempt of court. "The National Lawyers' Guild is very much concerned," their argument runs, "about the use of the injunctive process in labor disputes. It is of the opinion that such use is contrary to the policy of this government as now established by statute and judicial decision." It is pertinent to note, as I. F. Stone pointed out, that in a parallel situation, the case of the railroads last May, the President felt that the use of the injunction would be illegal under the Norris-La Guardia act. At that time the President believed that special legislation was necessary to act. Cold to labor in May, he evidently loves it less in December.

THESE are the bare, legalistic aspects. But what is the substantial truth? What goes on behind the batteries of lawyers? This: all of labor is astir to win wage increases that can contend with the steeply rising cost of living. The raises won last winter have been erased: and this in a year, as Philip Murray has pointed out, in which industry has made $15,000,000,000 worth of profits, almost four-fold that of 1939.

The great corporations, insatiable in their gold-lust, want to fend labor off. Hence they are chafing with impatience until the new Congress convenes with its satchelsful of legislation designed to cripple labor, to amend the Wagner Act, to annul the past decade's advances. Hence the unprecedented pressure upon the wilting administration; hence the unmitigated campaign in the papers. Hence the mealy-mouthed "extra-judicial" threat of Judge Goldsborough that labor will suffer restrictive legislation unless the miners supinely surrender.

The tip-off can be found in a house-organ of the steel industry, the magazine *Steel*, which saw "long-term" results that would be "beneficial to the nation" in a prolonged coal strike. Callous as a piece of ticker-tape, it says "the long-term results would be attractive." Obviously, those behind it hope to conjure up that political climate which would enable them to bludgeon our people into acceptance of legislation setting the country back to the turn of the century.

And there is danger they may succeed, although it is clear that reaction has failed in its first premise: that organized labor would stand aside and allow the UMW to be crushed. The industrialists trafficked on the divisions within labor; but their aspirations fell short, for both major wings of labor, the CIO and AFL, promptly aligned themselves with the miners.

It is not as yet certain whether the concomitant plan will be realized: that of alienating the middle classes, the profes-

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sionals and the farmers from the coal miners. This is the continued objective of the journalistic blitz. One dare not doubt the possibility that this may occur; and it will if several steps are not immediately taken. First, it appears to me that a common labor strategy is imperative. The leaders of the AFL, CIO and Railroad Brotherhoods must sit down and map out a common strategy.

One of its results must be a joint crusade by labor to clarify the issues among the people.

Simultaneously all progressives, all liberals, all honest-minded Americans should initiate community-wide actions immediately, endorsing the coal miners' position, and protesting that of the administration and big business. If this is not achieved, the furious propaganda may well take root. There is danger that the people will be stampeded by the multi-pronged campaign, dragooned onto the side of reaction by the howling propaganda describing the brown-outs, the rail traffic limitations, the shut-down of schools, the rationing of coal, and all the other measures that are being utilized to whip up a national hysteria.

Reaction is ringing the doorbell of the great majority of 140,000,000 Americans. On your threshold stands a man with an injunction—against life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

"NO CONTRACT—NO WORK"

The miners' loyalty to their union is far stronger than the threat of any injunction.

By VIRGINIA SHULL

IT WAS very quiet during the summer months along the Kanawha River. Sitting on the levee at Charleston you could measure the primary activity of the valley in the long strings of coal cars, 140 to a stretch, which roll along the easy gradient every fifteen or twenty minutes across the river. All the while workers through the rest of the country were gathering in demonstrations, waving placards, rolling up petitions on OPA, southern West Virginia quietly enjoyed a month of sunlight after a late, rainy spring.

Along the Kanawha the big smokestacks of du Pont, Libbey-Owens-Ford, the Owens Illinois Bottle Co., Union Carbon & Carbide, the Appalachian Power Co., West Virginia Chlorine Products, Electro Metallurgical, Kelly Axe, Monsanto Chemicals, American Viscose and the lesser chimneys of the many natural gas plants stand like markers proclaiming the valley's business. And in the thickly-wooded "hollows" running twenty, thirty and forty miles into the hinterlands, the bituminous minefields with their flimsy camps feed down to the main line tracks on the big river.

The territory belongs for the most part to the United Mine Workers proper, District 17, and John Lewis' catch-all District 50 chemical workers. I had come to Charleston last April toward the beginning of the first miners' strike, which wore the idyllic character of a long holiday with much fishing, fox-hunting (not the red-coat kind) and painting up of houses. Throughout the mine holiday there was little talk of how the strike was going. Even when the national press grew hysterical and squealed that the national welfare was being jeopardized by their "unreasonable" demands, the miners simply went about their personal business or pleasure, taking the whole thing for granted.

But despite the artificial quiet, the result of long-established pressures on the rank and file of the UMWA to leave political action to international headquarters, the strength and deep-going union solidarity with which the miners face any threat to their organization could be felt. The early battles of the United Mine Workers which made labor history in the bitterly-fought Paint Creek and Cabin Creek strikes of 1912-13 and the state-wide battles to win union contracts for the Guyan valley in 1920-21 have left a deep mark, and it does not take long for any observer to sense the quicksilver responsiveness just beneath the surface in the miners' union that is full of potential action.

"NO CONTRACT, no work," is an old, deeply-ingrained union principle with the UMW membership, and when during the strike Lewis sprang his two-week "truce," there were rumblings among the usually quiet rank and file. Whole locals stayed out, mostly in the Pennsylvania region; in others the older miners argued vigorously against going back with nothing won. In the confusion I heard of one local president who fought furiously against going back at the ratification meeting of the local union because, he said, Lewis certainly wouldn't have used 158 words in a telegram simply to tell the miners to go back to work. As the "truce" came to an end with no settlement in sight, shortly after the debacle of the railway strike, it was quite clear that the miners would not have gone back to work, instructions or no, and Lewis knew it.

In a very large way the present strike is the strike of the rank and file and not a strategic move conceived in the headquarters of the international. All the questions which were left unresolved by the government contract have now become the realities of daily life which cannot be compromised out of existence. It is their voice which is making itself heard over the gruff accents of John L.

The pressures which have culminated in the present coal strike were brewing even before Lewis signed the agreement with the federal government. During the first strike there were voices raised here and there for a 30 percent minimum increase in pay and a forty-hour week. But Lewis chose to fight the strike almost solely on the issue of the health and welfare fund, a demand which struck one of the most deeply-felt chords in a region where the maimed, the half-blind, the rotten-lunged are everywhere for the most casual observer to see.

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Marantz.

But only a week after the settlement the miners were already griping about the long work-week of fifty-four hours. The long strike holiday had not taken the weariness of four years of back-breaking overtime out of their bones, and fatigue was a present daily misery which has been mounting ever since.

The crisis in the OPA, the packers' meat strike and the creeping price hikes that finagled their way through the innumerable loopholes of the old OPA hit the coal camps with characteristic sharpness. The cut in real wages came swiftly as cheap food and clothing vanished completely and the weekly groceries required an outrageous outlay.

In the Kanawha valley the stores were stripped. Butter, lard and meat completely vanished from the counters, and beans, the "miners' strawberries," were selling at twenty-five cents a pound even under OPA, gilded with the label of "seed beans." "Just plain pinto beans," the miners growled. The *United Mine Workers Journal* consistently carried on a campaign against OPA, but the miners, who do not pay much attention to the *Journal*, for the most part were for the preservation of OPA, and sent in many resolutions from locals in support of price control.

At one point there had been no meat in the company and independent stores for over a week. You can't mine coal on potatoes and salad greens. The miners took action in their own way. "No meat, no work," they said, and at places in the Kanawha and New River fields they simply stayed home. This finally got the district officials busy and they, characteristically, ran to the operators (even though the government was supposed to be running the mines) to see what could be done about getting staples back into the coal camp butcher shops.

How swiftly the miners will react to immediately threatening issues they showed in their reaction to the first overt move of the Ku Klux Klan in West Virginia. In Logan County, which has a long history of vicious warfare against the union, a local at Procter elected a Negro president. (Negro officers are common in West Virginia mine locals, often in greater proportion than their numbers in the union.) Open threats were made that Witten, the president, and the slate of officers elected with him would not serve out their two-year terms. Late in July the vice-president's home was visited by a sheeted figure who disappeared into the dark, leaving behind on the door a cross with a letter R—"Hit the road."

Later a fiery cross flamed on the mountainside. The miners grabbed their guns, ran out and peppered the hillside with shot. Then they marched in fury, hundreds of miners from five locals, led by white local leaders. They carried banners reading "Down with the KKK!" through Accoville, Riley, Becco and Amherstdale to Proctor, where they held a meeting. They declared, "If the Klan touches one hair of John Witten's head, 12,000 miners will come up here and turn their white sheets bloody red." They went to the circuit judge and the prosecuting attorney and got the protection of extra deputy sheriffs to patrol the district, plus the explicit recognition of their right to defend themselves with guns against "anything in a mask." Local, state and federal investigations were got under way.

The deepest bond the miners know is their significant devotion to the principles of organized labor, and especially to their own union, for which they fought so bitterly and so long. The outsider who knows something of the real history of Lewis and the

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miners' union is commonly baffled by the respect that he commands from the rank and file of one of the proudest of all groups of workers. Actually those feelings are a curious mixture of loyalty and misunderstanding. I have met miners who simply refused to believe that Lewis could have been against the reelection of Senator Kilgore and against the OPA. "Why, Kilgore's a labor man," they would say, as if that settled the question.

The miners' devotion to their union is also far stronger than the threat of any injunction. Of all the legal weapons that have been invoked in anti-labor struggles the injunction is more closely interwoven with the bitterest warfare of the miners' past than any other. Far from being frightened, the miners, seeing the ugly weapon raised again, are setting themselves for a resolute struggle against it.

The miners have recognized from the beginning that the formalities of government operation were a myth. A well-pressed officer in Navy blues and an American flag flying from the headhouse were the sum total of change in the mines' daily operations. The operators' superintendents carried on as before, grievances arose in familiar patterns, the arguments against the miners were the operators' arguments, and the profits made under the American flag were the operators' profits. In addition, the miners felt acutely the insecurity of not knowing when all the unsettled issues between the union and the operators would again break into the open. They never felt they had a contract and they have known that sooner or later they would have to thrash out the differences in a second battle. They were already restless on this score in September. Lewis' action in calling the strike is rooted in a profound and justifiable unrest among the miners themselves and the hard facts of what the dollar will no longer buy over the grocery counter. The miners' needs now bulk too large to be gainsaid.

It is hard at this point to predict the outcome. The operators, especially the Southern operators who were reliably reported to be out to break the union in the spring, still hope to see it broken. They are looking to Truman for a ukase in the pattern of the ultimatum to the railway workers (which damned Truman forever in the miners' eyes). They want to make out of the "dangers" of the mine strike the biggest possible case for anti-labor action on the part of the Eightieth Congress.

The miners, on the other hand, are in a strong position to win their gains, with the backing of both the AFL and CIO. The mine union that seemed like a sleeping Gulliver in the spring has begun to rise. And the crucial decisions that will resolve the mine strike will have much to do with how the lines of battle will be drawn for the rest of labor and for the American people.

H. Sternberg.

portside patter

By BILL RICHARDS

News Item: Louis Budenz claims that Communists are waging a "war of nerves" in the United States.

EASTBROOK O'DONNELL COMMENTS

The constant opposition of the Communists to mythical NAM profits, alleged fascism in our country, and propaganda about a housing shortage is all part of a subversive war of nerves. Already there are reports that many landlords and business men have been so unnerved that their physicians have ordered extensive Florida vacations. Some have even been forced to retire. It is not uncommon to see them loading their pitiful savings into two or three moving vans and heading for their country estates.

But real Americans are fighting back in this war of nerves. The NAM, which has more than its share of nerve, has been collecting nickels and dimes from its members to defend free enterprise. The total of $4,700,000 is our best weapon to combat the Communist lies that monopolies, anti-labor laws, and high prices are a menace to the people. The president of one corporation even put off buying a much-needed yacht for several weeks so he could contribute his pennies to the fund.

The Communists have been stirring up the people and making them dissatisfied with conditions. Workers are actually beginning to believe that their families really need milk, shoes and medical care. Naturally the cost of living has doubled in the last few years but many workers got a 17 percent raise only six months ago. And Communists never point out the salient fact that the American standard of living is more than ten times higher than that of Madagascar.

These same forces are attacking American, British and German firms who are just trying to make their ends meet. I have heard Leftists say that the term 100 percent American businessman refers to his profit, not his patriotism. This is Bolshevik propaganda. It's high time that the people realized that big business has been holding this country up for years.

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MARXISM AND FREEDOM

At the very moment when man really takes possession of the means of social production his struggle against the natural servitudes will end in victory.

By RENE MAUBLANC

FREEDOM is a very broad subject. I should like to sum up its principal aspects and show how Marxism offers an integrated solution to the many problems it presents—problems ordinarily studied in various branches of philosophy, thereby receiving a variety of unconnected solutions.

It is with widely divergent meanings that one may say a man is not free. A man is not free when he is in prison, when he is threatened and does not have his own choice of decisions. One may likewise say it of a slave, or of a man without civil and political rights. One also says a man is not free when he is in a fit of temper or in the throes of passion. In sum, what prevents a man from being free is anything that restricts his will and makes him dependent. Hence one may be tempted to conclude that freedom is the absence of all constraint, of all limitations; that freedom is the power to do anything that pops into one's head. This is an inadequate conception.

In the realm of philosophy these different meanings of the word freedom are, so to speak, crystallized in two conceptions: on the one hand, psychological freedom, freedom of the will, generally called "free will"; and on the other social freedom, the freedom to act within society, freedom in respect to public authority. Free will is taken to be the power to act without any kind of determinism, the power to do anything without reason as a determining factor, to act or not to act, to do one thing or another under identical conditions.

These diverse meanings of the word freedom in philosophy apply to both the personal and external spheres of action. They signify the power to choose among several possible acts without such choices being determined by reason. This is an idea that has been put forward from time to time by certain philosophers and in a variety of forms. But whether it is expounded by Epicurus or Bergson, by Descartes or Thomas Aquinas, free will is always an absolute power, a power without conditions supposedly given to all men solely in their capacity as men. It distinguishes men from animals, which are considered subject to determinism. Thus one of the privileges of man is said to be the fact that he is free in the sense that he can do exactly as he pleases without foundation of reason.

At first glance social freedom seems to have no relation to psychological freedom. In eighteenth century theory, set forth in the Declaration of the Rights of Man, social liberty is considered one of man's rights, inalienable and sacred. It is a right inherent in human nature and a right refused man for a long time only through injustice. This right was at last recognized and proclaimed in 1789 and is considered to have been achieved under bourgeois democratic regimes.

This freedom, moreover, expressed itself in many forms: freedom of thought or of conscience, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, as well as freedom of trade, freedom of industry, freedom to work, freedom to own (what is called the right to property), or freedom to bequeath property. It is supposed to be a trait inherent in human personality, it must exist for everyone, and it is limited only to each person by the freedom of other persons. Actually, this freedom is not considered anarchical. According to the Declaration of the Rights of Man "Freedom consists of the power to do anything that does not hurt others."

There do not seem to be very clear and well defined relations between free will and this freedom of the Rights of Man. As a matter of fact the problems are discussed separately without any kind of connection and often they are even solved in different ways. Thus, one may very well deny free will and accept the right of man to social freedom. However, there is a closer relation between these two ideas than one thinks.

Above all, there is the common idea that in both cases freedom is considered a human property, a right that exists by the very fact that one is a human being. This right may be more or less recognized or flouted in a given society, but it is inherent in the human personality.

Marxist criticism, however, attacks both these ideas, seeing in them a false interpretation. Not that freedom is not a human value; but, as I shall try to demonstrate, freedom is not a fact. Freedom is an ideal that must be gradually realized because freedom is an effort to get away from servitude to nature and achieve, little by little, a higher state of existence.

THERE have been critiques of free will by a great number of philosophers, and Marxism puts forward nothing new in regard to it. It is almost a commonplace in philosophy to declare that free will is an illusion, that man cannot have the power to do what he wants to without reason, that the human will is subject to a rigorous determinism, the same determinism that exists in all nature. Consequently, far from being a miracle of indeterminism, permitting us to do anything under any conditions, real freedom of the human will consists in understanding the laws of human nature, character and will, in order to escape from the dependence and servitude of human nature.

This is an idea that one meets in the works of certain philosophers, particularly the works of Spinoza, who expressed it in unforgettable fashion.

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"Old Man Karamazov," by Boardman Robinson. From *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Feodor Dostoevsky (Random House). See review of *Boardman Robinson*, by Albert Christ-Janer, on page 24 of this issue.

There is a phrase of Spinoza's, often quoted, which says that the true liberation of human activity consists in becoming aware of its servitude. This is an idea which has constantly entered into philosophic thought. Real freedom of the mind exists only because there are laws in nature; and because there are also laws of human character, a man can change his character by making use of these laws.

The Marxists have taken this idea from Spinoza, from Leibnitz, and in particular from Hegel. Hegel, for example, used this formula: without doubt, human acts are to be explained by causes, they are all determined; but, he added, "Necessity is blind only insofar as it is not understood." To the extent that man recognizes necessities —that is to say, the laws of his emotions and will—to that extent can he learn to use them to his own advantage, to change himself, to remold his character, to be free.

Thus, freedom of the human will is not something we acquire in advance. There is no freedom in advance; but there is, step by step, a kind of gradual liberation of man to the extent that he learns to make use of the laws of his nature. A man is not free because he is a man. As man begins to develop his understanding and his reason, in the same proportion he begins to be free; and if he could be entirely rational: that is to say, if he could guide all his acts by rational motives and not by shifting emotions, to that extent he could become more and more free. A man who gets angry easily, if he does not understand his own anger, if he does not resist it, will be enslaved by his anger and his acts, instead of being dominated by his reason, will be dominated by his emotion. The better a man knows himself, the more he succeeds in freeing himself. The free man is the man who knows how to make use of his reason.

But just as man can master and rise above servitude to his emotions, he can also rise above servitude *to external nature. By external nature* I mean the laws of the external world —the physical, the chemical, the physiological. Man is subject to these laws to the extent that he does not understand them. But if he succeeds in understanding them he succeeds in liberating himself from them by mastering and using them. This is the fundamental idea of all modern science. Lightning is mastered by knowing how to render it harmless through the lightning rod; electricity is mastered by utilizing it to produce electric light.

Nor is this concept strictly Marxist. What is more important, I think, is that Marxists applied this idea not only to the domain of human will and emotions, not only to external nature, but also to the laws of social life. In reality, human society presents itself in the same way as do physical facts—as a reality which we cannot shape as we please, a reality that resists us; and we will only overcome this resistance by studying reality and knowing how to make use of its laws. This idea is much more recent in the history of philosophy. Actually, it is a long time since man became aware that he could not do as he pleased with the external world. It is quite clear that natural phenomena always appeared to man as strange forces which dominated him and with which he had to reckon. But for a long time man thought human societies were within his own sphere of action and that he could do with them exactly what he wished. For society appears to represent the common will of men who come together, who strive to build an ideal. These human societies appear to be made by us. Consequently, we are reluctant to consider them forces foreign to our whims or to our will. Also, for a long time, instead of developing a sociology —that is to say, a study of social life— man created utopias: he proposed plans for the ideal state. The utopians, for example, drew magnificent plans on paper, imagining that the realization of these plans depended only upon men.

But experience proves that it does not only depend upon us. We have become aware that society resists us —our will and our effort, just as the phenomena of external nature resist us. Certainly, it is not enough to wish for good weather for the sun to shine; no more does it suffice for men to wish for happiness for wars and poverty to disappear. To say no to war does as little good as to say no to lightning or

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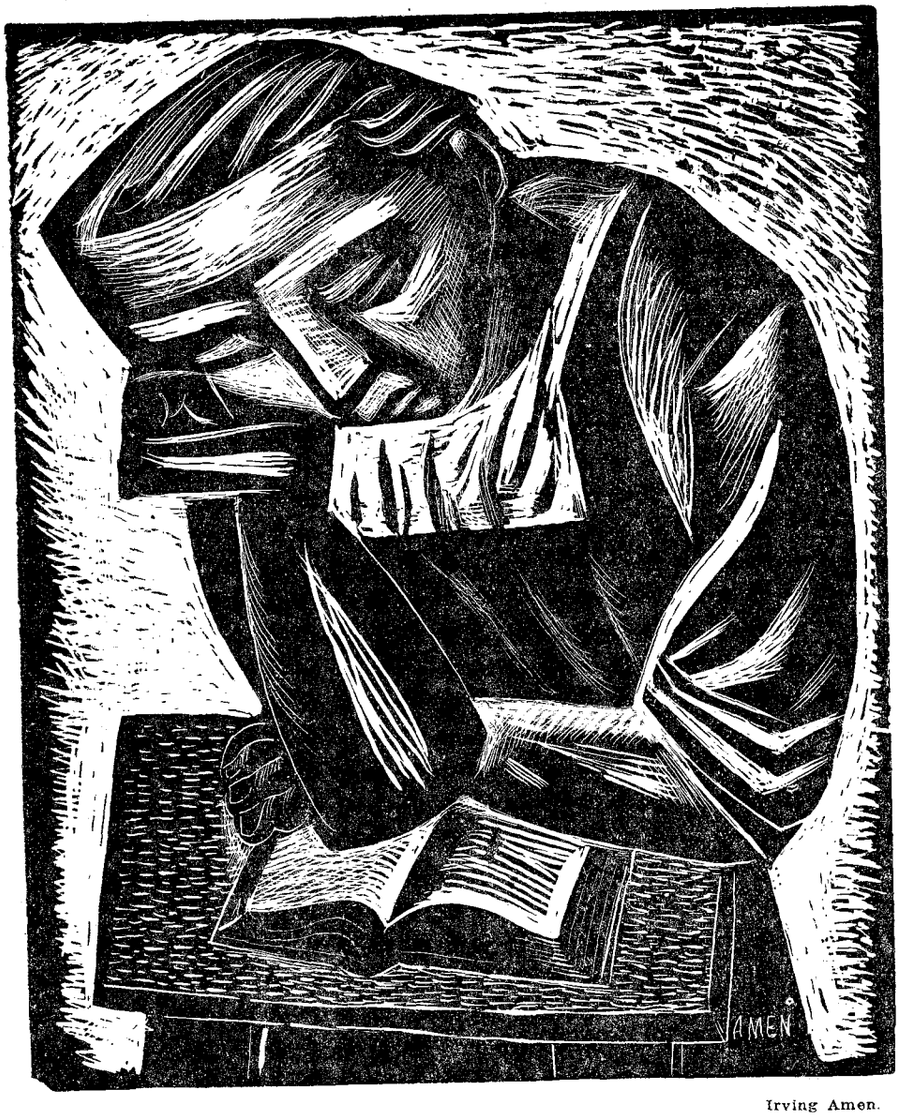

Irving Amen.

to the plague. Society, like the external world, is subject to laws. To be able to change society, one must understand it and study its laws. As soon as one admits (and how can one refuse to admit it?) that it is not enough to wish for a just society in order to achieve it, we can only act upon social life if there is an orderly pattern in it, a necessary sequence of social facts, which allows us to predict with certainty what will happen under given conditions.

A passage from Frederick Engels' *Anti-Duhring* clearly sets forth these ideas: "Hegel was the first to state correctly the relation between freedom and necessity. To him, freedom is the appreciation of necessity. 'Necessity is *blind* only *insofar as it is not understood.*' Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence of natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work toward definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental life of men themselves. . . . Freedom, therefore, consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on knowledge of natural necessity; it is, therefore, necessarily a product of historical development."

In his *Ludwig Feuerbach* Engels also tells us that while men are, without doubt, conscious and thinking when they act in society, they do not always do what they want to do and the result of their action is usually completely different from what they wanted. This is why historical events appear to us to be guided by chance—chance being not haphazard force but the interconnection of unknown laws. It is only in proportion to men's knowledge of the consequences of their acts, and consequently their knowledge of the laws of society, that they will truly be able to do what they want to do. They will thus be able to become free with respect to these social forces.

So until now, men have actually been slaves to their emotions, to the laws of the external world, slaves even to societies, which they had the illusion of guiding but which, in fact, guided themselves according to their own laws, making fun of the plans and desires of men.

The science of society—that is to say, historical materialism—must allow men to liberate themselves also from those social necessities which until now have crushed them because they did not understand them. Man must at the same time free himself from all forms of servitude. Here is another passage from Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* which expresses this idea: it is, he asserts, at the very moment when man really takes possession of the means of social production that his struggle against the natural servitudes ends in victory:

"Then for the first time man, in a certain sense, is finally marked off from the rest of the animal kingdom, and emerges from mere animal conditions of existence into really human ones. The whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which have hitherto ruled man, now comes under the dominion and control of man, who for the first time becomes the real, conscious lord of nature, because he has now become master of his own social organization. The laws of his own social action, hitherto standing face to face with man as laws of nature foreign to and dominating him, will then be used with full understanding, and so mastered by him. Man's own social organization, hitherto confronting him as a necessity imposed by nature and history, now becomes the result of his own free action. The extraneous, objective forces that have hitherto governed history pass under the control of man himself. Only from that time will man himself, more and more consciously, make his own history—only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him. It is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom."

The concluding half of M. Maublanc's article will appear next week.

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JAM SESSION

"Classic" jazz and modern jazz, manner and method, small band and big band—the discussion goes on.

A NEW MASSES FORUM

"What Is Jazz?" by S. Finkelstein, which we printed in our November 5 issue, aroused widespread interest. Many readers hailed it as the best article on this subject which has yet appeared (see Mail Call, p. 22). Others thought that Brother Finkelstein had missed a beat or two in his piece and so we continue the discussion this week.

Lawhon Milford is author of the jazz column, "Hot Notes," published weekly in the "Daily Peoples World," San Francisco. NM readers are familiar with the work of Thomas McGrath and S. Finkelstein. Mr. McGrath has contributed poetry as well as literary and movie criticism. Mr. Finkelstein is our regular music critic and has written numerous book reviews for NM.—THE EDITORS.

LAWHON MILFORD

S. FINKELSTEIN's excellent article "What Is Jazz?" in the November 5 issue of NM deserves wide reading by anyone interested in American musical culture. In particular, analysis of Rudi Blesh's theories is something that has needed doing for the reason that some of Blesh's propositions play squarely into the hands of those who start with "the Negro is naturally musical" and end up with vicious race poison.

Where Finkelstein's article loses both clarity and force is in his approach to modern jazz. I think he is to be congratulated on tackling the question. My own ideas on the subject are so incomplete and so unsupported by argument that I hardly dare defend them. I know that I prefer the music of certain early jazz bands, most of them composed of Negroes from the Southern states, to the exclusion of all others. I too, like Blesh and Finkelstein, feel that the big bands lose many of the qualities that mark the playing of small outfits like Oliver's Creole Band. Blesh feels, and I feel, that the qualities that are lost are qualities of rare musical value, qualities so important that the big bands are not playing the same thing, whichever you prefer to call jazz. Comparison between string quartets and full symphonies is obvious and, perhaps, useful. In this case the small bands have achieved things musically that the big bands have not yet achieved. I'm not at all sure, from present evidence, that Blesh's argument that the big bands can never achieve the same musical excellence isn't true.

Finkelstein's argument on this question is confused and contradictory. Early in his article he says that "small band blues known generally as 'New Orleans' music" is our "greatest jazz music." He admits that "qualities were . . . lost" with commercialization and that "Tin Pan Alley tunes tended to replace the blues." He then proceeds to ridicule Blesh's argument that jazz musicians must restudy and relearn the lessons of the small New Orleans band by saying that this must be an argument for return to "barren neo-classicism, a reiteration of old patterns until they become platitudes"!

Is it any wonder that I am confused?

I can't see that it is necessary in order to establish the virtues of the present-day big jazz band to argue against such a band playing the small band New Orleans style. Let's talk about each on its own merits.

If the small New Orleans bands, in Finkelstein's own words, produced "our greatest jazz music" why not keep that music alive exactly as we have kept the classical quartets alive, as we have kept the Elizabethan drama alive? If big present-day bands are capable of producing a new kind of jazz with merit as great as that of the early jazz bands let them do so, and let that music stand on its own feet.

Finkelstein points out that commercialization has destroyed many fine American art forms, that Tin Pan Alley and Hollywood dominate American popular culture. What he apparently proposes is that popular art forms make their compromise with this new rubbish, that the old forms be forgotten. The Soviet Union has approached this matter quite differently. They are making extensive efforts to keep alive popular forms which have existed unchanged for *hundreds of years*.

What Finkelstein should be saying is that commercialism's standards make it very difficult for an artist today to practice the old forms. What he should be proposing is that the government provide the conditions under which the old forms can still flourish. His attempt to prove that we must derive a new art from what is good in the old forms is all right, but in holding up as examples such things as Elizabethan drama and poetry, etc., he demolishes his own point. What art lover proposes that no one play Shakespeare because we now have new stage equipment and a different society? How then propose that no one play the old jazz forms because we now have new instruments and more of them?

I submit that Finkelstein has done a generally fine analysis but that his arguments in this respect are badly formulated and poorly supported.

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THOMAS McGRATH

Charles White. Forty-fourth Street Gallery.

IT IS devoutly to be hoped that the article "What Is Jazz?" by S. Finkelstein in a recent issue of NEW MASSES is the beginning of a tardy recognition by the left wing of a tremendously vital kind of art. Recognition is perhaps not the word, since one knows from experience that individually the Left has for a long time cherished this kind of music. But it is a good thing for NM to discover what has been for a long time an open secret. Jazz has been the ugly child of the arts, opposed by cultural bluestockings as well as by a few intelligent reactionaries. And yet, thanks to the Negro people, it is the only truly American art form, and it is, in origin at least, one of the few really proletarian arts in the world.

This may look like big talk, but if we stop to consider for a moment we will remember that, whatever new variants we have created—music, poetry, painting, drama, sculpture, architecture—all these were originally imports of European culture. Whatever the developments which are typically American, our poetry, for example, is still recognizably related to the main body of English verse. Jazz is much more recognizably a new thing. It may have points of contact with African music; it certainly owes something to the rags and, especially so far as the New Orleans stuff is concerned, to brass band music, but the differences are far greater than the similarities. There is no point in pushing this too far. Jazz might be the original art-form of Lower Slobovia rather than America, and it might require a whole new dictionary of terms to describe it or a new sense organ to appreciate it. The main thing is that it would still be a kind of art and an important one.

As for the proletarian origins of jazz, no one will deny the kinship of blues and folk songs, or that blues soon became the "music of the urban Negro proletariat"—I am trying to quote from memory from *Background to the Blues* by a left-wing English writer named—I think—Ian Laing. Further, no one will deny that blues constituted a large part of the original content of jazz. Even the *method* of jazz is contained in a more or less undeveloped form in the blues—undeveloped because jazz, at its best, requires three voices, and the blues, if we count in the piano or guitar, allows for only two. Finally, jazz was the special music of the Negro longshoremen of New Orleans before it was taken up by the fancy New Orleans bordellos. It is true that jazz was "adopted" by the middle class for a period, and it is at this point that corruption sets in. There is nothing so good that bourgeois "culture" will not try to slime it all over. But the real jazz kept alive even after the killer-diller and the 475-piece dance band took over. It will probably even survive Woody Herman and Re-Bop.

It is at this point that I would like to go a couple of rounds with comrade aficionado Finkelstein. He writes: "... it is still the matter, not the manner, which makes music an art involving people's emotions and human relationships." Right there we run into trouble.

It is this which gives jazz the quality of new art, this "manner" of playing which is one of creating the thing new each time it is played. It is what gives jazz its freshness and the tremendous pulling power and feeling of concentration which is induced in the listener. That is why it is possible for someone like Louie to take a sickening piece of offal, a popular song, and create out of it a work of enormous excitement, because he is using the song, its "tune," as a mere starting point, building onto it his own honest and deeply-felt experience, or satirizing it as he loves to do with these verbal sugar-tits of the corrupt composers. How is it possible for a good jazzman to take a soporific tune like "My Blue Heaven" and still make something of value out of it, if it is not by his "manner" of treating it?

It is true that a part of the "manner" of jazz is to *add* content, and it may be that part of my disagreement with Finkelstein is due to a misreading on my part or an ambiguity on his. I would argue that this content which is "added" and not "given" by

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the piece of music on which the jazzman is working is a part of the manner of jazz. Finkelstein says that, later, the Tin Pan Alley tune "tended to replace the blues, thus giving rise to the misconception that jazz was only a 'manner' of playing, not a musical folk language." Let us grant that the best jazz is the vintage stuff, blues (or stomps or hymns or marches?) played in a certain manner with the traditional three horns out in front. If we remove the blues and substitute a pop tune, the result is still recognizably jazz, although not so good or powerful. It is a little like mounting a .22 on a .45 frame.

About Ellington. I do not see how any large part of the later Ellington can be said to be "wholly of the blues," nor can I agree that Ellington's influence is a healthy one. He has done some wonderful things and up until a few years ago it was all worth listening to. I have no objection to experimentation—without it any art becomes decadent. But the old jazz *was* experimental and alive within traditional and "classic" forms, while what passes for "the development of the jazz," by those like Whiteman or musicians of talent or genius such as the Duke, has continually led away from the real jazz and has set in its place bastards and hybrids. These hybrids may be interesting enough or even enjoyable. Let there be many of them. But to argue that this is "jazz on a higher plane" as some people have done is to bury Caesar, not to praise him. It is to kill off jazz and substitute for it one of the greatest libels on the human race —popular music.

Can such things be? Well, what happened to jazz? After being despised as that "low" music (because of its proletarian and Negro origin), it became popular with the middle class—popular first in the bawdy-house where it could be accepted since by being there the listener was already outside the social bounds; popular later in the speakeasy and the dance hall. Unfortunately it was popular in the way that all art is popular with the middle class in a conspicuous consumption society: as a fad. With this kind of attitude, innovation (not experiment) becomes an index to approval. The great jazz soloists, exploring the range of their instruments, often blew jazz out the window in order to provide a special rear for the old lady from Dubuque at the first table. The collectivity of the band disappeared and all that was needed was a collection of stuffed dress suits behind that leader man who was blowing high, fast and meaningless, but never hot. The power-house arrangement appeared with all eighty-five saxes moaning in unison and a blow-top solo by the star.

This is the "development" of "jazz." It has reached a point where jazz is never heard on the radio, except for a few canned programs put on to fill time or because the local station manager was unable to defend himself from some jazz-lover on his staff. Along the way a lot of great artists, as great as our finest poets, Louis Armstrong for example, got tangled up in their own cement-mixers and lost most of their steam.

Fortunately a lot of jazz men escaped (some were lucky enough not to be able to read music) and with them what remains of the real thing. I don't think jazz must inevitably die out. I think it can be saved. But to save it we have to know what the real thing is, and we must develop a non-bourgeois audience to receive it.

S. FINKELSTEIN

THE efforts to keep the small band New Orleans jazz before the public are a great service both to the public and to American music. If I had to choose between the older, or "classic" jazz, and modern jazz, I would unhesitatingly choose the former.

Happily we don't have to make any such unrealistic decision. And the problem to me is not which type of jazz is better, but where is jazz going, and what are we going to do about it?

In our discussion of jazz, I think we are in danger of romanticizing proletarian art. Jazz is truly a national art, and a proletarian art. It is the richest body of such national and people's music that we know, probably because other folk music culture of the past is known to us only in scraps. But there have been examples in other cultures of great art of and by the common people: the folk poetry and stories of the Middle Ages, the sculpture of the Gothic and Romanesque cathedrals. All of this art, like jazz, has special qualities; a simplicity and earthiness of language, a saturation with honest emotion, a wonderful clarity and strength of line and design, a combination of what the esthete would call "abstract" qualities, or mastery of the medium, with a fully realistic symbolism and function. Such qualities came about because this ar grew for no other reason than to serv the people who produced it, and reflected in its form and content the collective human relationships, their vigor, their feeling for reality and their social needs. So powerful is this art that it makes a great deal of the work from more pretentious workshops look sickly. This is true of "classic" jazz. It makes

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not only the more synthetic modern product sound pale, but even a great deal of the serious music produced by trained composers.

But what we have to remember is that if this art reflected the cultural strength of the common people, it was also shaped and limited by, and bears the marks of, the narrow and poverty-stricken ways in which they were forced to live. We may not recognize this fact when we enjoy the work of art itself, separated from its environment. Or we can even prove that this art, such as jazz, is not a reflection of the unhealthy places in which it came to birth, but a healthy affirmation of life and a human triumph over the degradation forced upon the common people by their economic overlords.

Al Blaustein.

But the masses of people are realists, as regards their needs and the shape of their lives. They ardently desire to embrace the ways of life, the comforts, the education, the cultural advances, which the aristocracy and bourgeois like to reserve for themselves. This means real progress to the people, and in our rhapsodies over folk art we are apt to forget the meanness of life which narrowed and ringed around the tight little communal life out of which this great art sprang. Thus it is with the Negro people and Southern jazz. If jazz was their triumph over the ghetto life, their affirmation of human power and imagination over the forces that would degrade humanity, they broke through the narrow ring when the opportunity offered itself, and willingly relinquished the jazz forms that were the product of that life. We don't have to lament this as a loss. The human power and creative imagination are still with the people, waiting new opportunities to flower. And if the people don't seem to follow us in our excitement over their folk arts, it is perhaps because they are a step ahead of us, remembering too well the miseries against which this art was a shield and bulwark.

Thus, relative to Milford's argument, I certainly think it is a fine thing to keep the old jazz alive and performed. But while this can help along musical progress, with the standards it sets, let us not fool ourselves that this itself is progress. There is one fatal difference. New Orleans, and Southern small band jazz, in its palmy days was a constantly growing, developing, experimental and changing art, eagerly taking to itself new instruments, melodic material, social functions and structural patterns. The modern reproductions of this jazz at best can only duplicate some of the creations of the past. Although I listen to them with great pleasure, I have found nothing new added. The very spirit of such performances prevents the addition of something new, since this jazz can only be reproduced in its old qualities by taking a purist attitude to it. And so, it is very useful to reproduce the great old music, just as, to use Milford's analogy, it is very useful to keep on performing Shakespeare's plays and Beethoven's quartets as they were conceived. But we wouldn't ask a modern artist to write in terms of the Elizabethan stage and language, or in Beethoven's forms and language. The analogy must hold for jazz.

IN TAKING to itself what McGrath calls bourgeois styles and forms, jazz is taking a necessary step forward. Just as we must not romanticize proletarian culture, or folk culture, we must not sell bourgeois culture short. At its best, it represents an accumulation of knowledge and technique, a set of forms adapted for broader public address, richer human characterizations and more complex ideas. These achievements, and even greater potentialities for culture, must be included in a people's art fit for our times.

This is the path along which jazz must go in order to remain fresh and growing.

I do not claim that modern jazz has attained this synthesis, or that it is even anywhere near it. Most of it has fallen prey to the standards and methods of the businessman-manufactured "popular art," which McGrath aptly calls "one of the greatest libels on the human race." But there have been fresh and enjoyable achievements, like, to me, the playing of Ellington and his splendid crew, or of Lester Young, Buck Clayton, Jess Stacy, Teddy Wilson, Count Basie, Art Hodes and many others.

At its best, this music is not a sell-out of old jazz to commercial tastes. Rather, it is an affirmation of the desire to make music, with the materials and within the possibilities that modern jazz offers, in spite of and in triumph over the standardization and sickliness of the Tin-Pan-Alley and Hollywood idiom. This music is not an "unhealthy" influence upon the "classic jazz," which lost its place in American life for reasons that had nothing to do with the appearance of Ellington and Basie. It is rather a healthy influence upon modern popular music, trying as much as possible to make an honest woman out of it. It is a tough job.

The trouble with these "bourgeoisified" trends is only that they haven't been able to assimilate enough of the technique and forms of bourgeois art

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at its best. In other words, when I hear an improvisation by Louis Armstrong or Meade Lux Lewis, what I lament is not the absence of the "old jazz," but the fact that a potentially fine composer of music is lost to America. The case is clearer when we examine Ellington's music. The Duke has done wonders. Unable to use the old forms of alternation between solo and ensemble, he has made a most subtle and imaginative structural use of the riff. Harmonizing his writing for full choirs, he still plays off the "blue notes" against these harmonies. Necessarily abandoning the continuous collective improvisation, he still creates music that is a collective invention of his fine musicians. I would agree that his attempts in larger forms, and more far-reaching musical ideas, are not successful. But this is due only to the fact that such forms, and such inclusion of social and historical ideas in musical form, demand a training, knowledge and mastery of structural materials on the highest level. It may be that the Duke will get there, or it may be that the demands of making a living will stand in the way.

If the latter takes place, it will be a great loss.

I am not asking jazz lovers to accept all of modern jazz, or anything they don't like; only to use the same sensitivity and taste in picking the good music out of modern jazz that they used with such wonderful results in picking the great old jazz out of the mass of poor stuff that also was created then. And if they still think the best of modern jazz is inferior to the old, let them remember that this new jazz is not harming or "destroying" the old. The old, thanks to the purists, is still around and can be heard. And the modern creative musicians are, like the old, trying to make the best music out of the opportunities that are given them to make any music.

The lessons, therefore, that I would draw from the history of jazz is not that we had something good and it is now deteriorating. Rather, that the entire history of jazz proves the artistic, imaginative, and creative powers among the masses of people. What we need for further progress is a more widespread musical education, available to the people; one not run by hidebound conservatives, of course, but by the finer scientific minds, and there are many such, who are beginning to solve the problem of using folk and national language in bigger, meaningful patterns.

We need to restore the idea of hot jazz, as against what passes for popular music, not only in terms of the recreation of New Orleans music, or the idolization of a few records or performers, but in terms of the restoration of the idea of improvisation, of creatively and joyously spinning out music, among performing musicians, using whatever styles, instruments and melodic materials appeal to them most. We need the abolition of Jim Crow, and of all forms of national discrimination, both in popular art and the higher strata of culture. We need the democratization of the motion picture and the radio. We need the subsidizing of cultural institutions in every locality, such as the theater, which can serve for fresh spoken drama, drama with music, and concert hall. This is a tall order. But such are the only lessons I can draw and the only path I see.

TYPOGRAPHICAL ERROR

"YOU'RE missing a lot if you don't read the *Herald Tribune*." That's what the subway poster said. Riding down to work the other morning on the "A" train we spotted the printed admonition while musing over the gem we had discovered in that morning's *Trib*. And congratulated ourselves for not missing something that might easily have been missed.

It was a letter to the editor: "*It has occurred to me that the American press may be responsible for building up a superiority complex in the Russians, which may account in some measure for their exhibitionism. Perhaps, if instead of publicizing everything they do in great headlines and pictures, the same space were devoted to what some other United Nations delegates are doing and confining Russian activities to small headlines, it might have a salutary effect on their behavior.*"

Modestly tentative and thoroughly qualified—"may be . . . may account . . . in some measure . . . it might"—true. Yet a suggestion like that can free the mind bogged down with Walter Lippmann and the Alsop boys.

And even as we thought ahead to what "might be" we had to stifle a small sigh for what might have been. Perhaps it all started back in '17 when there was quite a furor in the press about the fall of the Romanoffs and what a man named Lenin was doing.

We saw the damage done in later years, too. Say in 1943 when Corporal Bridger came tearing into the barracks with a newspaper whose screaming headline kept us up half the night in wondrous excitement. How much better if the press had played it like this:

Nazi Army Wiped Out at Stalingrad
Red Army May Have Been Somewhat Responsible

Surely that approach would have erased any incipient Russian superiority complex along with Von Paulus and the myth of Hitler's invincibility.

Nor could we resist the impulse to dream about how nice it would be if in its reporting on the UN the press would heed one letter-writer's plea and give us a front page that would look like this:

Gen. Smuts, Delegate of a Small but Democratic Nation, Demands Annexation of Southwest Africa

Molotov Makes Unimportant Speech

That ought to do it.

L.L.B.

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UNION MEETING: DEEP SOUTH

"They doan belong," Bill said, "We're not gonna spend our treasury for nuthin' but trappers."

By JULIUS METZ

Illustrated by Henry Boyd.

IT IS a hot, sultry afternoon and the white streets and pavements of Morgan City, Louisiana, are hard to look at under the sun. The awnings have been dropped down to the curb ever since the sun passed the meridian and entered the cloudless western sky. The sidewalks on Front Street are shaded tunnels between the crossings. Along the river-front docks across the way, a good part of the shrimp fleet lies tied up, shrimp trawls hanging from the booms, and the Atchafalaya waters flash sudden bright lightnings.

The windows are open on the upper floor of City Hall, where the Trappers' Union meeting has been under way for an hour. The members have taken up the problem of getting land for the coming trapping season. They have considered the secretary's report of the auditing of their books, and heard that a date has been set for the NLRB hearing on their largest employer, who had fired men for joining the union. Sometimes the words, spoken low, are lost in the whirring of the ceiling fans from which no breeze is perceptible.

Now they are listening to Bill, an old trapper who owns land and employs other trappers. The New York organizer, who had founded the local a year and a half ago, is on the pan. He had organized the shrimp "headers" and packers and enrolled them temporarily into the Trappers' Union. Almost all the seafood handlers are Negro men and women. Old Bill is angry at the organizer for including them with the trappers.

"They doan belong," he concludes. "We're not gonna spend our treasury for nuthin' but trappers. We're here to organize trappers. Ah motions that we cuts 'em loose in thirty days."

George has been nodding his head. He asks for the floor, says, "Ah agrees," and sits down.

Harvey J. Lewis is on the platform with the organizer and the secretary, who is acting as chairman because the president and vice-president are "outside," away on the Gulf, fishing shrimp. Harvey is president of the independent shrimp fishermens' union and honorary president of the trappers' Local 5 of Morgan City. He is given the floor.

He reminds them that his fishermen never questioned his taking time, energy and money from their union to help organize trappers. The trappers should not begrudge any assistance given to organizing others workers. But he does not stay on that point long. He knows, as do the hundred-odd members present, that the objection is being raised because the shrimp headers are Negro.

"Whenever you divide white from black, you're cutting yourself in half and helping Wall Street," he tells them. "You gotta help organize the Negro and make it so he gets the same wages as you because as long as he gets less, you'll get less." He takes off his glasses, wipes them with his handkerchief, and quickly puts them on again. The men are looking up at him, attentive to every word. Bill's face is turned away but he is listening, looking sidewise up at Harvey.

"First thing they do to separate you is to pay the colored man less," he continues. "Then they make you not let him vote. Louisiana don't have no poll-tax but you know the colored folks don't vote except in a big place like New Orleans. If you'd let them vote, if you'd make sure they voted—not let anybody stop 'em—then we'd get the Congressmen who'd represent us, not Wall Street. The Negro will vote our way because he's a laboring man like us. You men should let the headers stay until they're strong enough to get their own local. You should help them."

Bill gets up. "Everyone here knows that Ah's allus ready to help a man in mah spare time"—

"Sure," a trapper agrees, "at $2.50 an hour."

Trappers laugh. Bill glares at them. One says right to his face, "He's so tight he'd squeeze a penny till Lincoln'd jump out and run North."

Bill boils over. "Whar will they meet?" he asks. "With us whites? Here? Ah doan want no N———r telling me to shut mah mouth and set down 'cause he done got the floor. Ah doan want mah wife to have no contack"—

Gray-haired Clemere Watkins, father of the president of the local, gets up. "What you talkin' 'bout, man, not wantin' yo' wife to have no contack? She done have contack in yo' own kitchen with the cook, she have it in the store whar she buy, she have it in the place whar she work. She kin have it here too." He turns to the organizer

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on the platform. "Doan we have no colored trappers in our union?"

"We do."

"Then whar is they?" He looks about the room. "Ah wants the secretary to make sure they comes to our next meetin' and sets here with us so they kin larn what's goin' on. Ah's tired of this separatin' white from black. They been using the Negro to bait, bat and beat us. So long's we're divided white from black, creed from creed, so long the boss'll have his foot on our neck."

He sits down amid a burst of applause from the members. Bill is displeased and frowning.

Hilton Rink, the strapping young trapper who has been a delegate to the recent furriers' convention in Atlantic City, speaks from the back of the hall, not getting up. "Ah motion thet we-all keep the headers with us till they is strong enough to be on they own, efen it take thirty days, or sixty, or *ninety*. . . ."

"Or 100 years," a trapper interrupts.

"Or 100 years," agrees Hilton. "Ain't we hyar to help one another, effen we-all is workers?"

Two old trappers are nodding their heads, intoning, "Yaymen."

The secretary, Bill's ex-Marine son-in-law, calls for a vote on Hilton's motion. "All in favor, say 'Aye'." The whole room roars an "Aye." He looks down at his father-in-law. "All opposed, say 'Nay'."

"Say what?" yells Bill, startled and suspicious.

"Say 'No'," repeats the secretary, correcting himself.

"No!" Bill calls out, all alone.

"You lose," shouts a trapper.

Bill gets up. "Ah feel"—

"We doan care how you feel," another trapper calls.

"Ah *still* thinks the same way." Bill sits down.

Harvey reasons with him. "We want you to see it the same as us. We want you with us, Bill."

"What's all the talk about?" a trapper calls out. "He knows he done lost. Next business!"

They take up the next item on the agenda, the results of the summer school they had successfully demanded for their children who miss school during the four months of the trapping season.

A faint breeze is beginning to steal through the open windows. Those sitting on the sills look out over their shoulders at the cool green grass in the shade of the palm trees, sigh, and turn back to the final business of the meeting.

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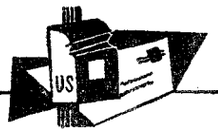

More on Kramer

TO NEW MASSES: Arthur Gregor's review of the Aaron Kramer-Don Gordon book in the November 5 NM, so surprised me that I was prompted to write this letter of protest. I agree with Mr. Gregor concerning the strength and imagery of Mr. Gordon's lines, but it seemed to me that Mr. Kramer was not given his just due. It was as if Mr. Gregor started reading from the Don Gordon side, and when he reached Aaron Kramer's end was either sleepy or mentally tired, and skimmed through the poems. No other explanation would warrant the hasty, thoughtless criticism he gave Mr. Kramer's work.

His choice of excerpts from Mr. Gordon's poems showed care and attention, but those from Mr. Kramer, often without benefit of title, were unjust. He gives an excerpt from the little poem "After the Ballet" with the accompanying comment: "Peel these stanzas of their rhyme and very little is left." Not at all! A very clear, delicate picture of a girl clinging to an illusion is left. The comment is downright silly. The rhyme is an integral part of that poem and the image created. I do not believe Mr. Kramer meant "After the Ballet" to deal with social conditions, as Mr. Gregor implies. Mr. Gregor, like many of our left-wing poets and critics, seems to ignore the fact that poetry which does not deal with social conditions can also be strong and beautiful. Mr. Kramer has often voiced his social protest, and does so in this little volume. But it was pleasant to notice that he can become more embracing.

If Mr. Gregor wanted poems of indignation, why did he ignore "Seymour Keiden," that beautiful poem to a "young poet-soldier killed in the war"; "To Festus Coleman in Prison," "The Song of the Burning Bush," "Victory Comes to the Unbombed Cities"; that exquisitely patterned poem, "Torgau, Where Soviet and US Armies First Met," yes, and even "Spring Song"? The two lines chosen from *The Glass Mountain* for quoting gave no indication to the potential reader of what to expect.

I hope Mr. Gregor will take up that book again, this time from Mr. Kramer's side, and give the poems the attention they deserve. DAISY ALDAN.

New York.

Gregor Replies

TO NEW MASSES: Michael Lorraine, with much emphasis on "Kramerian clarity," assures us [NM, November 26] that Aaron Kramer writes about capitalism in his *The Glass Mountain* and not about war; that is to say, his analogies are those of capitalism and not those of war. Another correspondent who was "distressed" about my review of Kramer's book brought up an interesting antithesis to the concept of "Kramerian clarity." She writes: "*The Glass Mountain* is evocative rather than specific: perhaps it is about the war we have just fought, more probably it is about the general evil of capitalism." Why then this contradiction which in effect strengthens the criticism set forth in the original review? I do not believe that we can assign correct values to a poem that is not specific. I argue that a truly evocative affect can only be attained if the entire structure of the poem is built around the specific. No emotion can be generated, no poetic abstraction can be made which is not built upon the specific. The clearer the specific, the stronger the evocative affect. The two are mutually dependent, completely functional.

Furthermore let me assure my correspondents that I carefully read Mr. Kramer's book from beginning to end. Probably more carefully, in fact, than Miss Aldan, who did not note that lines from poems which she claimed I ignored were not only mentioned but actually quoted in the review. From "Victory Comes To The Unbombed City" I cited these lines for their strength and good imagery:

What ruined city roars up from our heart
to catch confetti hurled in celebration?

Miss Aldan's, as the other criticisms on the review, completely overlooked the positive aspects brought forth in it.

One of the my critics says that "Kramer is only beginning to find himself as a lyric poet." I agree, and it is precisely from this standpoint that I reviewed the poems in *The Glass Mountain*. "*Es ist noch niemals ein Meister vom Himmel gefallen* (a master has never yet dropped from the sky), goes the old German proverb. If, then, it is the opinion of some viewing this artist's development that he is deviating from the path he has set himself, it is for the good of the artist that such opinions be voiced.

I am all for lyric poetry, where good language is as important as rhythmic fluency.

ARTHUR GREGOR.

New York.

On Broadway: Gow

TO NEW MASSES: Isidor Schneider's piece on revivals in the Broadway theater (NM, November 12) deserves some comment. Mr. Schneider calls Broadway "one of the best horrible examples of culture under capitalism." The best horrible examples of culture under capitalism are the press, the radio and the movies, in just that order, and in any such negative competition, the Broadway theater runs a very poor fourth. To reverse this into positive reasoning, in comparison to the other media the theater, partly by virtue of these very revivals which Mr. Schneider finds so disappointing, is displaying a variety and vitality that should, I think, be appreciated and encouraged.

For example, in order to derogate Rostand's play *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Mr. Schneider compares it to, of all things, *The Duchess of Malfi*. One might quite as reasonably criticize *Peter Pan* by comparing it to *The Taming of the Shrew*. The sheer irrelevance of the comparison was startling. It's a little late in the day to discover that *Cyrano* is "stilted, artificial and banal"; it is all of those and a lot more, and long after we have a socialist America *Cyrano* will continue to be performed to the delight of all who are young in heart, a category which I hope will still include me but from which Mr. Schneider has apparently resigned. For the truth is that *Cyrano*, in its romantic and florid dramatization of a gigantic inferiority complex, in its contempt for rank, in its innate anti-clericalism (in the best French tradition), is by no means an anti-social, or even unsocial, play. Its appeal is not in any sense an unhealthy one, even though Mr. Schneider terms the play merely an "adolescent revery." If all such "adolescent reveries" were to be excised from our literature we would have to decimate our libraries and lose a good share of our culture.

In damning with faint praise Jose Ferrer's performance as Cyrano, Mr. Schneider seems to set up abstract standards of perfect acting that can exist only in his own imagination. Standards of acting are relative to time and place; in the United States, 1946, judged in relation to the overwhelming vulgarity of output from press, screen, radio and theater, Mr. Ferrer's skillful and imaginative performance deserves the highest praise.

Underlying Mr. Schneider's article is the persistent idea that we ought to have repertory theater. He is absolutely right; there is no argument on this point. But to use the fact that we don't have repertory as a big critical stick to belittle and derogate what we do have this moment on Broadway is again to set up an abstract standard of perfection rather than to search out and encourage the relative virtues of what does exist in reality. Also it is to fall into the trap of idealistically implying that repertory theater will solve all our problems. It isn't that simple. The unhappy production relations in the theater can, of course, be solved only by a much more drastic social change than the mere establishment of repertory theater. But beyond that, the creative and artistic problems of theater are not automati-

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cally conquered by the establishment of repertory companies; it is true that the problems are put upon a higher level and can be attacked more confidently and consciously, but that abstract perfection for which Mr. Schneider seems to search will be only a little less distant under a repertory system than it is now.

As a matter of fact, we do have three repertory companies in New York: the American Repertory Theater, the Metropolitan Opera Company, and the City Center Opera Company. They are, all of them, in widely varying ways, excellent companies, but a study of them to date does not indicate that repertory system, in and of itself, produces any magical virtues. Under any system whatsoever, standards of performance will continue to be relative; imperfections will exist; and those artists who with daring and imagination rise above the commonplace and mediocre should receive our praise and encouragement.

JAMES GOW.

New York.

On Broadway: Schneider

TO NEW MASSES: Mr. Gow, himself, quotes me as saying Broadway is "*one* of the best horrible examples of culture under capitalism," then goes on as if I had said "*the* best horrible example."

I made no set comparison of *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Cyrano de Bergerac* as plays; I made an incidental comparison of the verses in which both are written, as poetry.

Would Mr. Gow make admiration for *Cyrano de Bergerac* the only and infallible admission test to his League of the Young in Heart? Mr. Gow's estimate of *Cyrano de Bergerac* as "a romantic and florid dramatization of a gigantic inferiority complex" is not far off from mine.

If criticism of acting is to be dismissed as setting up "abstract standards of perfect acting that can exist only in his imagination" then, in Mr. Gow's view, all criticism of acting, or anything else, is pointless.

Mr. Gow gives the impression that I dismissed all four of the revivals discussed in my review. The fact is that I gave hearty approval to two. Since Mr. Gow does not defend the *Lysistrata* I presume that he concurs in my judgment of it. That leaves the issue, as far as specific productions are concerned, with the *Cyrano*. In his discussion Mr. Gow leaves untouched the central point in mine, the illustration that *Cyrano* affords of the imbalance of the Broadway star system.

Finally, in my advocacy of the repertory system, I nowhere implied that it automatically guaranteed perfection or solved all problems. I offered it, using the collectively-operated, state-guaranteed companies like the Old Vic and the Soviet theaters as examples, as the prospect of something better than we have been getting on Broadway.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

New York.

What is Jazz?

TO NEW MASSES: I should like to commend you on your publication of S. Finkelstein's article, "What Is Jazz?"

First, because it is another of those articles growing out of book-reviews which show up clearly the difference between criticism and commercial book-reviewing as it is handled in the bourgeois press.

Second, because of its scientific approach. Early in the article, Mr. Finkelstein distinguishes between the two classic bourgeois philosophic attitudes toward all phenomena —idealism and mechanical materialism. He shows how his subject—Rudi Blesh—is no reactionary, no idealist. Then he shows that Mr. Blesh is a bourgeois progressive—that is, a mechanical materialist. And, as he proceeds to reveal the dialectical materialist, the only truly progressive approach to phenomena, he succeeds in revealing that, in effect, Mr. Blesh's would-be "progressive" position is, in effect, as reactionary as the several enemies he himself visualizes.

Finally, I like the article because it reminds me of lengthy discussion between myself and a friend just a few years back. Mr. Frank Marshall Davis, Chicago poet and head of the Associated Negro Press, now editor of the Chicago *Star*, taught a course called "What Is Jazz?" in my department at the Abraham Lincoln School in Chicago. Frank and I regularly used to try to hammer out a scientific approach to jazz. Our main pitfall, always, was the same as Mr. Blesh's. I'm glad to say we skirted it by the same type of reasoning—perhaps less well-informed, certainly less coherently worked out, and most assuredly never so well presented as Mr. Finkelstein's.

New York. ARTHUR STERN.

Ballad for Finkelstein

TO NEW MASSES: Just a quick note in the middle of a very busy schedule to express my deep appreciation and thanks for this fellow Finkelstein.

His music reviews and criticisms have been on a fresh, imaginative and constructively high level. And his article on jazz ["What Is Jazz?", NM, November 5] is far and away the best thing of its kind I have ever read. I want to meet that guy sometime. More power to him and NEW MASSES.

Brooklyn. EARL ROBINSON.

South Africa: Turning Point

TO NEW MASSES: I have just received your August 9 issue with reprints from *Rand Daily Mail*, which makes excellent reading and should give you in America a fair idea of South African attitudes. Particularly interesting is Mr. Mushet's (Minister of Posts and Telegraphs) statement that South Africa is the most democratic country in the world. After Spain and Greece, he should have added.

August 12 was a definite turning point in South African labor history. Fifty thousand African mineworkers came out on strike after working since 1900 for the same miserable cash wage, despite the considerable rise in cost of living. All letters to the Chamber of Mines were unanswered. On and off more than 100,000 workers struck. They were forced back to work at the point of a bayonet and the strike was broken by police terrorism. A general strike in sympathy with the mineworkers was voted but was prevented from taking place, again because of terrorism.

Many hundreds of workers were arrested, about thirty were killed and many hundreds injured. Fifty members of the Communist Party were arrested after the party's offices were raided. Their trial is coming off during this month and it promises to be full of fireworks.

These events have shaken South Africa. The fascists call for more stringent suppression, which one of course expects. Other people are frankly worried, for they know the strike was not the work of "agitators," as the government is trying to prove, and there is a deep social sickness here.

White South Africa is in for a very grave shock if it persists in considering its prejudices as more important than human life itself. People of the kind of E. J. Roberts in your article would deserve everything that is coming to them, but unfortunately many apathetic but innocent people will suffer, too. But that is the price South Africa will have to pay for its short-sighted stupidity and apathy.

H. WOLFSON.

Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

Eisler to Speak

TO NEW MASSES: I believe your readers will be interested in knowing that Gerhart Eisler, the German anti-fascist refugee journalist, will reply to charges leveled at him by Louis Budenz before the Wood-Rankin Committee. Although Eisler had been subpoenaed by the committee on the same day that Budenz was he was refused an opportunity to testify. Eisler along with others will speak at a meeting at 8 P.M. on December 11 at the Fraternal Clubhouse, 110 West 48th Street, New York City. The meeting will be held under the auspices of *The German American*, anti-fascist German language newspaper.

GUSTAVE FABER,

New York. Editor, *The German American*

Likes Joe

TO NEW MASSES: Reading Joe Foster's film review of November 19, I got the the feeling of being on solid ground again after an exciting and interesting ocean trip. I want, therefore, to retract a suggestion I made a few years ago when I requested a variety of reviewers rather than one. I urge you now to keep Foster on *all* reviews.

Los Angeles. HOWARD FELDMAN.

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review and comment

DESTINATION: NOWHERE

Letty Fox grabs at life in a world of greed and frustration. Christina Stead's new novel.

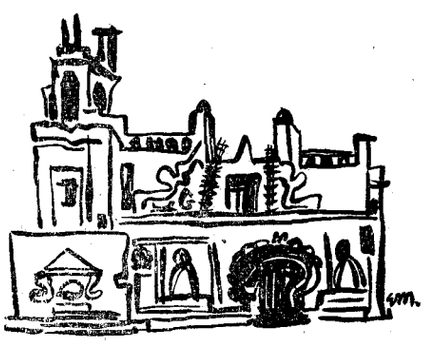
By BARBARA GILES

LETTY FOX: HER LUCK, *by Christina Stead. Harcourt, Brace.* $3.50.

"I SAW everything, but did not understand it." While that sentence merely expresses Letty Fox's reflection on a specific episode, it might also serve as her epitaph. To be sure, Letty's chances for enlightenment were not very good. She was born into a social group whose own understanding is used up in the perpetually immediate business of securing money and what passes with them as "love." The men are amoral and predatory while the women are amoral and slightly more predatory. Economically a part of New York's middle class, they are so unrooted in human values as to appear almost detached from class itself, their occupations serving less to establish and identify them than as way-stations on the route to nowhere. While they neither create nor produce, they retain the power to grab, and often grab the best, corrupting it in the seizure. They can take the most progressive ideas of education, based on a civilized respect for the child as a human being, and pervert them into cant by which, in turn, they pervert the child. Or they snatch shreds and scraps from the whole complex cloth of modern psychology to fashion a noose for the straying husband and father. The old hypocrisies have become outworn; self-interest is better served by a new, more "advanced" posturing.

Of this repellent crew the two most defenseless are Letty's mother and father, Mathilde and Solander. Mathilde is a poor grabber, weakened by self-pity and general lack of gumption. When Solander turns to a mistress, she tries to recapture him with a bit of oldtime patter ("a child is sacred") mixed with the new ("a child who has been abandoned is bound to feel inferior"). Relatives clamor around her with advice: have another baby, buy a new hat, load him with debts . . . while they utilize the situation to pick Solander's pockets on every pretext. Solander, whose weakness is an affectionate and essentially decent nature, more or less extricates himself by walking off, but not before Letty has received a full education in the strange uses to which her elders put marriage and children. She is further instructed by the example of the alimony pensioners at her grandmother's hotel as well as by the marital and premarital adventures of relatives whose goings-on defy summarizing.

Letty, however, is no "sensitive child" brooding and groping amidst the adult herd. She is a fat, loud, spoiled, incredibly precocious brat to whom the family messes are more fun than a circus. Whatever escapes her avid little ears she picks up by prying into her mother's mail, after which she and her sister Jackie go about shouting hilariously at odd moments: *Make him pay or clap him in jail!* By the time Letty grows up she too has formed a conception of love—a yen for conquest and an unappeasable itch in the flesh. Equipped with her strange learning, with good looks, a quick, hard cleverness and an enormous energy without direction, Letty sets out to conquer.



E. Miller.

From there on the story is that of Letty's countless, dismal, self-repeating love affairs. The men she attracts —to whom she is attracted—are weaklings, phonies, lechers and adulterers, many of them from the fringe of the radical movement, playboys of Greenwich Village and Park Avenue who find every use for Letty except as a wife. One takes money from her, another forces an abortion on her and demands back the cash he has advanced for it, a third sends her to a comic-strip psychiatrist who says in the first (and last) interview, "You have a father-fixation." Always they leave her. As she enters her twenties, Letty's ambition narrows: she wants simply to be married, to have a child. Her girl cousins have married, her baby sister is growing up, her friends find husbands—why does she have no "luck"? Finally at twenty-four she does marry, and becomes pregnant; but you would have to be a fiend for happy endings to regard that as one.

This chilling drama of greed and frustration has a large cast with extensive lines. Background details are plentiful. Yet as a portrayal of a society it seems incomplete throughout, recognizable in certain conspicuous features but never fully comprehended. The basic reason for this, I think, is that Miss Stead allows Letty herself to tell the story—the author states in a prefatory note that "The language and opinions are those of a type of middle-class New York office worker" —and Letty is not a comprehending person. In *The Man Who Loved Children*, Miss Stead also gave us a picture of middle-class marriage and morality wherein the chief characters were obsessed by their thwarted need for money and love; but one could feel the presence of an ordered judgment and understanding in the narrative itself. While Sam Pollit was a repulsive person he was a living person —his deformities were explicable, as were the deformities of his world; and the author's wit and grace of language helped to make the novel one of the greatest of the past decade. In her latest work, however, Miss Stead has abdicated to a character whose insight is limited by lack of heart. Other peo-

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ple deprived of moral guidance may at least fashion, from ordinary impulses of affection and consideration, some decent principle of human relationships. One could even be as promiscuous as Letty and still form a notion of what constitutes a stable and satisfactory love life. No such thought, apparently, occurs to Letty. She merely wants—out of vanity and appetite—and what she wants she too grabs, discovering later that the article isn't much good. The feverish process, endlessly repeated, leaves little room for perception. On page 290 a character is promisingly introduced as a "well-known trade union organizer, a cartoonist and a pamphleteer" with a distinctive personality; before we get to know him further, Letty has reduced him to a machine for fornication. Most of the characters appear thus cut down or distorted, viewed in the tarnished light of morbidity. The one really moving incident in the book concerns a little factory girl, a friend of Letty's kid sister, who gives birth to an illegitimate child. It is a brief incident, however, rising like the sudden soft flare of a rocket thrown up in the night and expiring as quickly, leaving only darkness.

Yet it is clearly not the author's intention to present Letty merely as a love-thwarted girl. She is, for example, given impressive intellectual qualities: scholarship, a talent for writing, political alertness, the ability to hold responsible jobs. These attributes, however, remain completely exterior and incidental. Her immunity to ideas having to do with her special problem is amazing. She can spend time in a revolutionary organization like the Young Communist League and come out with no deeper observation on the historical position of women than a piece of dormitory cynicism about former slaves and cattle having been freed to become mistresses.

Letty's very membership in the YCL is puzzling, the more so just because it is so incidental. People do not ordinarily join revolutionary groups, become active in them, and later write autobiographies in which the whole business is treated rather like a sorority phase of college life. True, Letty's father was a socialist; and what, she asks at one point, is more natural for active, intelligent youth than to be revolutionary? Nothing—except that it doesn't seem natural for Letty. While the YCL was no more puritan than it was libertine, it certainly required enough clarity and discipline to rise above a preoccupation with bedrooms; an organization that sent thousands of its members to fight in Spain could hardly have been a very comfortable place for Letty. Perhaps she has simply inherited her family's habit of snatching from the best? If so she doesn't know how to use it; her life has scarcely more meaning than that of her sister Jackie, whose retreat into esthetic idealism ends in a pathetic and rather horrible pursuit of an aging "Faust."

Most likely, Letty is only a play-radical, like some of her lovers and friends. That such people sometimes attach themselves to the revolutionary movement is undeniable. As a rule they soon find their way out again, usually through the back door of ultra-leftism which permits them to feel both safe and "militant." At any rate they make not only the most unnatural of revolutionaries but the least interesting and important. To present them as Miss Stead does, without the contrast of one genuine Communist, distorts the picture beyond even the broadest limits of caricature.

Boardman Robinson

BOARDMAN ROBINSON, *by Albert Christ-Janer. University of Chicago Press. $15.*

BOARDMAN ROBINSON is seventy years old today. It is twenty-four years since he drew his splendid cartoons for the old *Masses* and then the *Liberator*. He was forty-five when he wrote of his dead friend, John Reed, with whom he had traveled through the Balkans and Russia during the First World War and whose book, *The War in Eastern Europe*, he illustrated: "The mysterious powers of change—amid a multitude in tears and to the triumphing strains of the *Internationale*—having placed the splendid body of Jack Reed in the ground once sacred to the Romanov, now stir in the heart of Russia, the capital of the world's workers."

Our tradition of struggle rarely permits men to regret for long the silence of an old comrade. Yet the silence of Boardman Robinson is a loss to us as well as to him. Even if he saw no other force at work in October than "the mysterious powers of change," even if he never achieved Reed's understanding of the Revolution, or a thorough understanding of Reed himself, he could nevertheless

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spot whatever was alive and creative in men and ally himself with that against the corrupt and the dead. But in ceasing to work with those who valued him so highly he lost the opportunity to apply his craft and culture directly to the greatest of all contemporary subjects—the myriad-sided class conflict, with its numberless tragic and triumphant incidents.

I speak of subject matter because Robinson is finest as an illustrator. His oils and murals are curiously conventional compared with his wonderfully lively sketches or his massive conceptions for Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Melville, Whitman and Edgar Lee Masters. Examples of all these appear in the present volume, the text of which is mostly valuable for its biographical information and Robinson's notes on teaching. Of the book illustrations those for *The Brothers Karamazov* (1933) and *The Idiot* (1935) show obvious signs of hurry. There are, however, certain exceptions, such as the tremendous head of Old Man Karamazov which appears on the dust-cover of Mr. Christ-Janer's book. [*Reproduced on p. 12 of this issue.*] The *Leaves of Grass* pictures (1944) have strong lyrical and evocative charm, but Robinson's powers are most fully embodied in his work for *King Lear* (1938), *Spoon River Anthology* (1942), and *Moby Dick* (1943). These show him to be an artist of undiminished emotional intensity as well as very wide emotional range. If his style occasionally suggests a comparison with Daumier or Rouault, this is only because he knew what to assimilate from a great tradition in order to join it.

Our artists have much to learn from Boardman Robinson. He reminds us that illustration need not be the low form of visual art which it is in the eyes of most dilettantes and even many serious painters. Actually, the distinction between art as the expression of form and as the expression of drama exists only in the critic's vocabulary and not in the creative action of the artist; the answer to the question as to whether the literary and plastic imagination run opposed or at best parallel to one another in the conception of a work of art must be one for the artist to give. And unless the critic is also a dialectician, he will continue to analyze into contradictory elements those aspects of the work of art, the illustration, which the artist has

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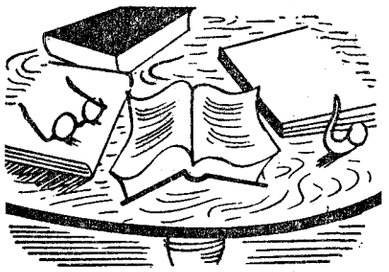

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There can be no doubt that Robinson's earlier association with the cause of the working class had its effect on his book illustrations. It is more than incidental that in speaking of Picasso's work he hit upon "the great drawing of the Guernica cartoons" as revealing "the magnificence of Picasso's ultimate possibility." He was never among those who wished to separate their painting from their human relationships. He once said, "The most difficult thing to reveal to a student is that he must find a way of life." That he absented himself from the struggles in which many of his friends are still engaged, and many of his students have joined, should not keep us from studying him. He has much to teach. And it would never be too late to welcome him back.

CHARLES HUMBOLDT.

From Proust to Dachau

KAPUTT, *by Curzio Malaparte. Dutton. $3.75.*

WHEN I was in Italy, during the war, I happened to speak with some middle-class citizens who had filled comfortable positions under the fascists. "Italy is dead—*kaput*," they said. They wished they could go to America. Then, the war in Europe over, Allied diplomats raised a cry for "Italian" Trieste. None of these people had thought twice of Trieste. In a few days, however, the right-wing press took up the cry, and they suddenly began to look cheerful. Their Italy was not quite dead—the Italy of violent nationalism, of expansionism and the threat of war. There was hope that the unity of the Partisans, the laborers and peasantry could be broken, and the old order would return again, with perhaps the Americans and British as guides instead of the Germans.

These thoughts came up while reading *Kaputt*, because this book, written while the war was on, is filled with the belief that a world has died, that it is *kaput*, violently annihilated. Malaparte's world is not that of the middle class but that of the European aristocracy. They hated the fascists because they were despised by them, and served the fascists because whatever remnant of their world remained depended for its continued existence upon the existence of fascism. Malaparte is one of that aristocracy. Assisting the coming of Mussolini, he then exiled himself voluntarily to the French Riviera. When he returned to Italy he was thrown into jail for a while. Released, he moved again in the highest levels of Italian society, exchanging cynical prophecies and whispered scandals of the private lives of Hitler, Mussolini and Ciano. He then put on the uniform of an officer in the Italian army and served as a correspondent with the German armies invading the Soviet Union. Nor was he an ordinary press correspondent. He moved almost as an official representative of Italy among the Germans, sitting at the dinner table of Frank, the Hitler-appointed "king" of Poland, rubbing elbows as an equal with generals and ambassadors.

Malaparte is a masterly writer, and some sections of this book telling of the horrors he saw will stand among the most harrowing pieces of reporting of the war. Unforgettable are the pictures of the massacre of the Jewish people at Jassy, of the more scientific extermination of the men, women and children of the Warsaw Ghetto, of the atrocities committed by the Germans upon Russian prisoners and the Soviet people in the year when they were most confident of winning the war. Equally vivid are the portrayals of the Nazi leaders he met, their heads swollen with the power they were able to exercise, arrogant in their contempt for humanity, their sadism and eagerness for killing intensified by the lurking fears they could never drive out of their minds. If the description of the massacred people is given intensity by his pity, his description of the Nazi big-shots is given intensity by his hatred. And both the pity and hatred are genuine. But the pity is that of an aristocrat who feels a moral obligation to be kind to the peasantry. The hatred is that of an Italian nationalist and aristocrat

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who looked upon the Germans as foreign masters of Italy, and upon the Italian fascists as men who did not know how to clothe themselves with power gracefully. There is kindliness toward the people but no love for them, no shred of a belief that they could take a share in remaking the world and run it better than the class which had brought about the chaos he saw. There is a revealing picture of the cynicism and corruption within the highest fascist circles but no inkling of what fascism really was, of its clear and conscious plan of economic plundering, of its dependence upon the great banks and industrial monopolies, of the fostering of hatred for democracy by monopoly capitalism in peacetime and its logical continuation of the exploitation of the people in war. To Malaparte the fascist-inspired war is not an episode in the contemporary political crisis but a sudden blood bath of the world so horrible that people of refinement and culture can only wring their hands and lament for the more pleasant world that was torn to shreds.

The book is saturated with memories of culture. Passages of realistic description alternate with evocations of the sound of a Chopin nocturne, the flavor of a passage in Proust, the line of a Giotto or Massaccio fresco. This cultural flavor is genuine, but smacks of an aristocratic approach which looks upon culture as a luxurious adornment of life. There is no inkling of the love of culture which embraces the view that if the people's literacy could be raised, and their creative energies released, a new art could be created that would shame the past. The book itself is designed as a work of literature, a Proustian novel, rather than a piece of direct reporting. While the experiences in it are offered as truth, they are recounted not in any chronological order but as memories that come back to the author, and as tales that he tells while in conversation with Prince Eugene of Sweden, or sitting at Frank's dinner table, or walking with Princess Louise of Prussia. This literary manipulation, like the descriptions of music and painting, is not pretentiousness. It reveals the true center of his interests, which lies not in the world but in himself and his class.

As such, it is a powerful document in its disgust, pessimism and self-revelation. Malaparte writes, "Everybody is a whore in Italy. . . . It has always been so, it will always be so. For many years I, too, have been a whore, like

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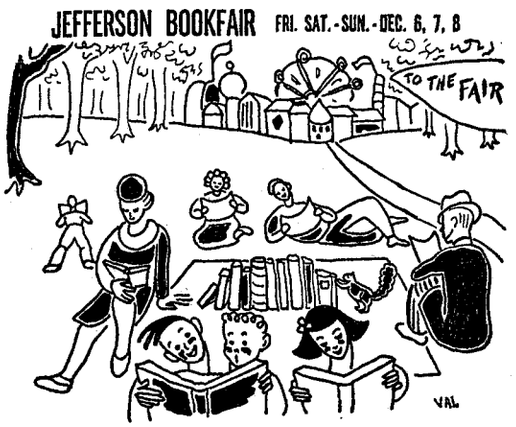

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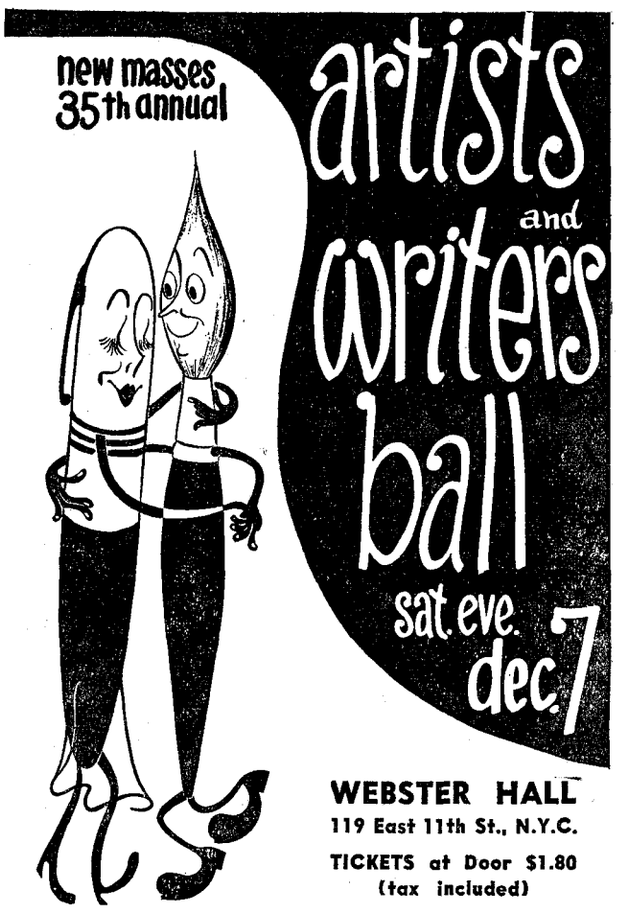

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all the others. Later I felt nauseated by life. I rebelled and I ended in jail. But even to end in jail is a way of being a whore. Even being a hero, even fighting for King and for country is a way of being a whore in Italy. Even to say that this is a lie and an insult to all those who have died for freedom is by way of being a whore. There is no way out, Friki." His is a familiar, perverted Italian nationalism which can say, "Italy is a dead country. What can you do with a corpse? You can only bury it."

These words may be laughed at, for Italy is obviously very far from dead, as the Partisans proved who took Milan from the Germans. But they are no laughing matter, for an old Italy is likewise being revived to combat the new. It is a startling fact that this fascist collaborator, who was released from jail at the plea of Galeazzo Ciano, and who numbers as his personal friend Franco's wartime minister to Finland, should have served since the occupation of Italy as liaison officer to the American High Command.

S. FINKELSTEIN.

Prize Stories

O. HENRY MEMORIAL AWARD PRIZE STORIES OF 1946, *edited by Herschel Brickell. Doubleday. $2.50.*

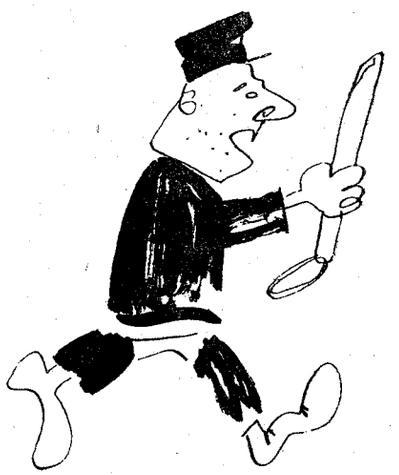
As is usually the case with prize-winning collections edited by succesful professionals, in almost any field, this group of short stories displays a high degree of literacy and competence. It is not the veneered craft of the slick magazines: of the twenty-two stories only four come from "commercial" magazines such as *Mademoiselle* and *Town and Country* (two from each of these). The rest are from such relatively "intellectual" publications as *The Atlantic Monthly, Yale Review, The New Yorker* and *Story*. We must therefore conclude that they represent a serious attempt by the writers to present contemporary life as they see it.

What they see is generally told in the currently acceptable form of seeming to tell nothing. We interrupt the character as he stares out the window. His dog dies and his wife makes a sympathetic remark, and in the end he feels better or worse about things because of those events. I do not wish to decry every use—and especially expert use—of this convention; there are situations in which it is perfectly valid and effective. But when story after story is cast in that mold, in what is presumably the collection of the best for a whole year, the effect becomes almost as monotonous as an American Tobacco Company commercial.

The themes that occupy the writers are almost equally limited, but at least there are signs that in one field—racial discrimination—their consciences have begun to twinge. Of the twenty-two, six stories are devoted to discrimination in one form or another, from Elizabeth Enright's "I Forgot Where I Was"—an appealing story of a Negro kid who goes South with her mother for the first time—to Irwin Shaw's "Act of Faith," in which a Jewish GI has to decide between selling a Mauser so he and the guys can have a weekend and saving it for a possible wave of anti-Semitism that his father and brother fear.

But if writers are developing consciences about patent racial discrimination, they show little concern for any of the other problems of present-day America. Even the one story of a veteran merely shows him being a little upset because he's not flying now. There is hardly a lower-income-bracket character in the book. Or if a character finds himself temporarily insane or down on his luck, he can always look back (and presumably forward) to the old house with the elms where he had been happy.

One exception is Meridel Le Sueur's effective story of a small-time drifter from job to job, dying on patrol on a Pacific island and trying to remember what his side-kick had told him of war and fascism and the people's fight for a better life, so that he'll be able to see some meaning to his death. The other



Mutch.

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is "The Blackboard," by Jessamyn West, a masterful character study (with something resembling a plot) of an insufferable prig of a male schoolmarm who marries a pleasant, normal woman from the wrong side of the tracks, then sets about "refining" her until she runs off with one of her earlier friends.

This is, in short, a collection of able and perfectly acceptable stories, but your life will not be at all affected whether you read them or don't.

SALLY ALFORD.

FILMS OF THE WEEK

"THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES," the new Goldwyn classic at the Astor, cost three million dollars and takes better than three hours to unwind. Not having seen *Gone With the Wind* or the old Eugene O'Neill marathons, this constituted the longest piece of uninterrupted theatrical sitting of my career. Yet I must confess that I did not find the picture overlong or draggy. It had excellent pacing, due more to the skillful and sensitive direction of William Wyler (his first job since his return from the war) and to the uniformly good acting of the entire cast than to the writing, which includes long stretches of commonplace boygirl movieschmertz.

Although *The Best Years of Our Lives* is better than average, it is considerably short of the world-shaking masterpiece that the ecstatic critics made it out to be. To its credit, it departs from the customary comic-strip treatment of returning soldiers. It is sober in its statement of GI civilian adjustment, although it does nothing with the problem beyond introducing it.

The three main characters, coming home from the wars to the same town, come from separate social strata. One is a banker, another a member of the suburban petty-bourgeoisie, and the third is from a working-class family that lives near the railroad tracks. Each of these three, taken separately, could furnish material for a first-class movie, provided there was a thorough study of all the interactions between himself and the events he passed through, and provided the incidents were derived from reality, and not some movie office file.

But *Best Years* could stand a great deal more of such reality. The home-again Joes are shoved into all kinds of irrelevant situations. Thus our ex-captain gets lost in a romantic shuffle and spends most of his time on the roller-coaster of love. He hits the high with the daughter of the banker, and the low with his wife, who is of the light-headed, loose-hipped variety. Only occasionally is he pulled back into the problem of readjustment. You might justifiably say that the relations of a soldier and his wife make up one of the commonest and one of the most delicate problems of emotional reconstruction, but here no attempt is made to deal with the matter seriously. The wife is not a person but a film character endowed with a rigid set of actions calculated only to move the plot along its ordained path, to provide a little cinematic heartburn for the bicarbonate of a happy ending to work upon.

Another of the actors (Harold Russell) has actually lost his hands in the war and in the film appears with prosthetic hooks in their place. In his case the problem of rehabilitation was real as well as apparent, and I would have liked to see more of his actual experiences included. Because the worries of the character he portrays — getting married, wanting people to treat him as a normal person, etc. — are more sharply defined, his case is the most cleanly handled.

The third man, vice-president of a bank in charge of small loans, including GI loans, is perhaps the most important character of the film. From him the movie gets its positive tone, the only continuity of attitude that it can boast of. Its feeling about war, its opinion of bankers who value collateral above human needs, its refusal to accept the indifference of the community toward the veteran, are all explicit in his role. Without him, *Best Years* would be indistinguishable from *Till the End of Time*, and others such. The banker has no such problems as face the other two. He is loved by his wife, his two grown children and his boss. But on his first night back, faced with the understandable embarrassment of the reunion, he does the town with his family. What follows is the details of

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a man on a monumental binge, expressed in the manner of a man doing a drunken vaudeville routine, unto his entanglement with the bed clothes, unto the morning hangover, with all the tricks and japeries. He just misses being the clown, the comic relief to his daughter's love troubles. For a long time after, his every appearance is greeted by loud laughter, and only some good speeches save his character. Such is the ability of Hollywood to louse up a good thing when it gets its hands on it.

Another characteristic that I resent in connection with this and with other films is the tasteless and deceptive way that music is used to underscore action. It often ruins a writer's effect, as it did in several of the key scenes of *Lost Weekend* and as it does here in the banker's homecoming. As he proceeds to his apartment, the music comes on, dramatic, portentious. The camera rests on the closed door of his apartment while the passage is worked up to the climax. At the least, promises the music, he will find his wife with another man. When the door swings open, the first figure shown is that of a young man, and everybody is sure that such is the case. But the young man turns out to be his son, and there is a great sigh of relief, not over his good fortune, but over the fact that what might have been a corny situation turns out not to be a corny situation.

Despite its many faults of thinking and construction, *The Best Years of Our Lives* is a serious film, and in some ways an honest one. But it is not a study of postwar readjustment equal to *Lost Weekend's* study of a drunk.

"NEVER SAY DIE," another Warner Brothers' glass bead, is a so-called comedy of manners, a bore based upon the efforts of a divorced pair to get together again. I did not wait to see how they made out, but from what I saw, I can report that they become involved in misunderstandings that a six-year-old child could solve. There *is* such a six-year-old, their child, but since she is cast in the image of a movie adult, she is no help either. When harmony between her and her parents appears possible, she says, "I hope daddy and mother get married again. Then I could be my mother's bridesmaid." That will give you a rough idea of the language that gets put into her mouth.

Most writers regard all child stars as midgets. Otherwise they would never be able to write dialogue that would satisfy the boss.

JOSEPH FOSTER.

RECORDS

PARENTS, in choosing records for children, should remember that children are realists just as adults are, often more so. Their minds grasp eagerly at real sights and sounds. Their perceptions are sharp. Even their fantasies have a symbolic connection with reality. The material given to them should therefore have such a realistic character. The stories and music, while necessarily simple, should make sense.

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"Peter the Piccolo" is another of the attractive humanizations of the symphony orchestra written by George Kleinsinger and Paul Tripp. The story is a little lame but the music is well written (Victor Y 322). Completely disgusting, however, is the Walt Disney perversion of "Peter and the Wolf," perpetrated now on Victor records with narration by Sterling Holloway. Here Prokofieff's deep respect for the child's mind is thrown out to make way for Hollywood's infantilisms, including a sex angle. Luckily the original "Peter" is available on records.

The Adolph Busch chamber ensemble continues its outstanding series of recordings of eighteenth century music, with one of the very greatest of piano concertos, the Bach D Minor. The pianist is the youthful Eugene Istomin, who does a beautiful and musicianly job, only in the slow movement handling Bach's emotions a little too lightly. Busch's interweaving of orchestral lines with the piano figuration shows the fine musicianship that characterizes everything he has done on records (Columbia M 624).

S. FINKELSTEIN.

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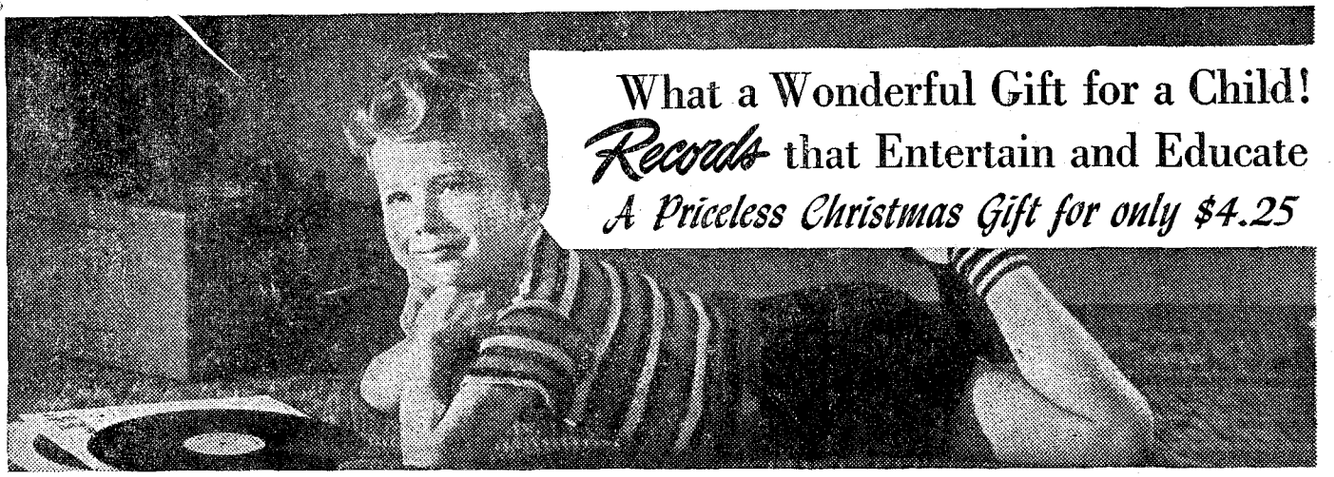

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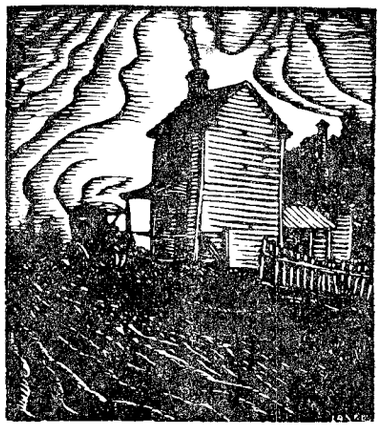

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